



**A Personal Account of
Hadhrat Khalifa-tul
Masih V's Tour to
USA 2012**

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Finding Out about the USA tour

Since early 2012 I had been hearing that Hazur-Aqdas would Insha'Allah grace the 2012 USA and Canada Jalsa Salanas with his presence. I was in regular contact with members of the Jamaat from both countries about the media plans for Hazur's visit. With each day that passed I could tell that their anticipation and eagerness to host the Khalifa was increasing. Furthermore, many of my family members in the United States also spoke about their happiness that Hazur-Aqdas would Insha'Allah soon be with them. In my heart I kept thinking how this tour promised to be a very historic.

Just a few days before the tour, Hazur-Aqdas asked me if I would be sad whilst he was away. I responded by saying that Hazur had not even yet departed and I was already sad and was already missing him. It was then that Hazur-Aqdas, with a radiant smile on his face, said I should get ready to travel with him on the tour.

I will never forget the feeling in my heart for those few seconds; it was beating faster and louder than perhaps was healthy and I strained to control my tears. Hearing these words from anyone would have given me great joy, but to hear them directly from our beloved Khalifa filled my heart with unparalleled joy.

No matter how much I thanked Allah for this opportunity it would never be enough.

Departure from London

I was soon told that we would be travelling on 16th June 2012 and that I should report at Masjid Fazl by 8am. I was very anxious, that God forbid, I sleep-in and thus be late to report. I set more than ten alarms on my iPhone to make sure I was awake in good time and I also asked my wife, who was in America visiting her parents, to call me to make sure I was awake! The night was very disturbed because the fear of not waking on time was such that it actually stopped me from sleeping the majority of the night!

As it turned out, thankfully I did wake up early and was ready in good time. I went and dropped my luggage at the Mosque before returning home briefly to lock up my home for the next month. As I left my house I did a *dua* in which I thanked Allah for the opportunity and prayed that on the tour I did not do anything that would displease my beloved Khalifa and I prayed that I would never conduct myself in a way that could ever reflect badly on Hazur-Aqdas and his Qafila.

All Qafila members, except for Hazur-Aqdas and Hadhrat Begum Sahiba, left early for the airport.

As we attempted to pass the first security hurdle, both myself and Mahmood Khan Sahib (Security) were red-flagged and were asked to report to a separate counter. Whilst we were being dealt with, I saw that Hazur-Aqdas and Hadhrat Begum Sahiba had arrived and had passed through to the Departure area. At that moment my heart sank a little and I was internally panicking. My heart was racing with fear that due to the security delay we might miss our flight.

Thankfully, after about ten minutes we were told that everything was ok and that we were free to go through. And so when we entered the Departure area, I saw that Hazur-Aqdas was sat on a bench waiting. I felt so much love for Hazur that he was waiting for the entire Qafila, rather than proceeding ahead.

Much later on in the tour I jokingly reminded Mahmood Khan Sahib about the incident and I said that in my heart I feared that my tour was over before it had even began! We both had a good laugh about this and he shared that at the time even he too had been a little concerned!

We proceeded towards the airplane. First we had to take a train and then a bus. It seemed as though British Airways wanted us to sample all forms of transport that day!

Just before getting on the bus, five or six of us were once again stopped and given an extra security checking. I had travelled to America a few times in the past few years and so I was quite used to such security measures, however I think for some others it was a new experience.

As I finally made it through the final security checking I walked towards the bus and, as I entered, Hazur asked me with a smile what they had been asking me. I answered that they did not ask me much, but they did search me very thoroughly!

Due to the many checks some of us faced at Heathrow, I was quite sure that when we arrived in the United States we would face extra security on that side also...

I could not have been more wrong.

Arrival in Chicago

When we arrived at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport as soon as we left the plane we were guided to a private room just a few metres away.

Ameer Sahib USA and other Jamaat USA officials greeted Hazur-Aqdas, whilst Hadhrat Begum Sahiba sat with some Lajna members. We were there for around fifteen minutes and then we were told that everything was fine and we were free to go.

The respect and dignity with which the USA received Hazur was truly uplifting – it honestly seemed as though Allah Himself had made all of the arrangements.

In the past I had experienced that sometimes the USA Immigration Officers could be a little rude and certainly somewhat suspicious. Yet Allah has a special relationship with his Khalifa and it is He who makes sure that the dignity and honour of Khilafat is always maintained, Alhamdulillah.

We spent two days in Chicago. The first thing I noticed was the vast distances. Just to get to the Mosque for Salat used to take quite some time and this was something that was also the case when Hazur's Qafila travelled to Ohio a couple of days later.

Visit to Sadiq Mosque

On 17 June 2012, Hazur-Aqdas visited the Sadiq Mosque in Chicago. This was an historic Mosque because it was the first premises ever purchased by Jamaat USA soon after the arrival of Hadhrat Mufti Muhammad Sadiq Sahib. Indeed the building had been the USA Jamaat's Headquarters until 1950.

As Hazur arrived at the Mosque he was greeted by hundreds of Ahmadis, many of whom were African-American. The Ahmadis were truly overwhelmed and overjoyed to see Hazur - many of them were crying, some raised powerful and loud slogans, whilst others sang Nazms. This was a scene that was to be repeated on numerous occasions throughout the tour.

Wherever Hazur went, Masha'Allah hundreds and sometimes thousands of Ahmadis were there to greet him. Just from looking at their faces it became so apparent that such love was pure and could only have been instilled in people's hearts by Allah. Just being able to witness and watch such welcomes was truly faith inspiring.

Hazur-Aqdas was shown around the Sadiq Mosque and as he was leaving Hazur happened to see a series of framed portrait photographs that had been taken decades ago. Upon enquiring as to who the people in the photos were, Hazur-Aqdas was informed that they were early converts to Ahmadiyyat who had converted many decades ago. Hazur-Aqdas immediately instructed that the Jamaat should search for the progenies of those early Ahmadis and seek to bring them back into the fold of Ahmadiyyat.

Visit to Zion and drive past Lake Michigan

From the Sadiq Mosque we proceeded to the town of Zion in Illinois, which is well-known to all Ahmadis, as the town of the false prophet John Alexander Dowie.

We drove through the Chicago city centre on-route to Zion and were able to drive past Lake Michigan. We did not stop but just from driving past it was clear that it was a really beautiful lake.

As we drove past it, I thought to myself how the vast majority of people would choose to stop and enjoy such a beautiful and scenic sight. But Hazur-Aqdas was not concerned for his own pleasure or enjoyment but was simply anxious to get to the next stop where the Ahmadi Muslims were waiting for him. It was another reminder of how fortunate Ahmadis were to have the institution of Khilafat – an institution that is a truly selfless. Our Khalifa desires only the well-being and progress of his Jamaat.

Zion is a small town, with a population of less than 30,000 people. I found it to be a depressing and sad town. The one exception was a building that had been purchased by the Ahmadiyyat Jamaat. It was there that Hazur's Qafila arrived and where he was again greeted by hundreds of Ahmadis, the majority of whom were African-American.

As Hazur departed from his car, slogans of joy were raised and Nazms were recited. When I saw this, the very first thought that came to my mind was that in the same town where John Alexander Dowie had once cursed the Promised

Messiah (als), today hundreds of people were there to welcome and greet his Khalifa. Whilst Dowie had long been forgotten, love for the Promised Messiah had permeated the hearts of many of the locals. It illustrated once again the Help and Support that Allah had blessed the Promised Messiah with.

Hazur-Aqdas spent the next couple of hours meeting with local Ahmadi Muslims. Each of them queued in the heat for long periods without any complaint because they were just anxious to meet with the Khalifa. And when they emerged from the Mulaqat their faces were either beaming with huge smiles or they were overcome with emotion, tears flowing from their eyes. This too was something that I would witness again and again during the course of the coming month.

After the Mulaqats, Hazur-Aqdas was given a tour by car of the town. We drove to the cemetery where Dowie was buried and also the building where he lived. As I thought about Dowie I felt satisfaction, that through his evil acts, the world had come to see a real and clear proof of the truth of the Promised Messiah.

Dowie's insults had led to Allah taking action in favour of the Promised Messiah, which led to the famous headline in a US newspaper that '*Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is Great*'. Seeing the love for Khilafat in Zion more than a century after the passing of the Promised Messiah (as) was yet another sign that truly '*Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is Great*'. *Alhamdulillah*.

American Lunch in Chicago!

We returned home late afternoon and so lunch was well after 4pm.

For many years I had heard about Chicago's famous 'deep-dish pizza' and when we sat for lunch I saw that our hosts had very kindly ordered some of this well-known pizza.

I took one slice and it was huge and thick and enough to fill my stomach completely. It was also very delicious Masha'Allah.

I could now say that I had also tried one slice of the famous Chicago pizza!

Departure from Chicago and visit to Dayton Mosque

On 18th June 2012, Hazur's Qafila left Chicago and travelled to Ohio. It proved to be a very long and tiring day. On that day those of us who had travelled from London were able to get some kind of understanding of the vast distances that separated American cities.

After a drive of around 400km we arrived in Dayton at 8.15pm and visited the Fazl-i-Umar Mosque, which is the oldest purpose-built Mosque constructed by the USA Jamaat. It was inaugurated in 1964 and has a rich history based on the many sincere and devoted African-American Ahmadis who live nearby.

Upon arrival at the Mosque we saw that once again there were hundreds of Ahmadis there to greet Hazur. The '*naaray*' were extremely loud and passionate and as I looked around I saw many people with tears streaming down their faces.

The Mosque had recently been renovated and extended, so Hazur-Aqdas inspected the changes. Despite the fact that it was late evening and Hazur had been either working or travelling all day, Hazur did not show any form of tiredness.

It was becoming quite clear to me that Hazur's true objective for the tour was to meet with Ahmadis, to help them and to show love to them. Our Khalifa was there only to give.

Even though it was late and we still had to travel for another couple of hours to our final destination, Hazur-Aqdas waited with the local Jamaat for Namaz time, which was at 9.15pm, rather than proceed and offer prayers at the final destination.

The local Dayton Jamaat had organised a small tea reception and as I looked around the room and as I spoke to some of the locals I could feel and sense the elation in their hearts. It truly seemed that in a matter of minutes in the company of the Khalifa, the hearts and minds of the local Ahmadis were being cleansed and spiritualised.

Even upon completion of the Maghreb and Isha prayers, Hazur did not leave immediately but stood for pictures with the local Jamaat and then distributed chocolates to the children present.

Despite being the youngest member of staff travelling from London, by that time I was feeling somewhat exhausted. I make that admission with a sense of shame because when I looked at Hazur, whether he felt tired or not I do not know, he never once showed it. His patience and generosity of spirit was something that I had seen for many years but in the few days of the tour I was seeing to an even greater degree.

Arrival in Columbus

We left around 9.45pm or 10pm and were assured by the local Jamaat that we would reach our final destination in Columbus, Ohio within an hour and a half but in reality it took us longer and we did not arrive until midnight.

Upon our eventual arrival I looked around at all the Qafila members and I could see that I was not the only who was tired, but all of the other members also looked exhausted and hungry. I felt particularly for the older members of our party.

Most of all, I thought of beloved Hazur. For he had been working or travelling the entire day and would now have dinner and then rest very little before waking for Tahajjud so that he could pray for the Jamaat. I could not help but feel emotional, thinking once again about how Hazur has given his life to serving the Jamaat of the Promised Messiah. I prayed that Allah grant him strength because the burden placed upon him surely could only be lifted with God's Special Help.

By the time we had ate dinner it was 12.45am and Fajr Namaz was just a few hours away. Hazur was staying at the home of Dr Ahmad Salam Sahib and after having dinner I felt like just lying down in the garage, however I was told that I would be staying at a home nearby.

A couple other members of the Qafila were also going to be staying there and one of them remarked to me with concern that everything is far away, what if the place we are staying is an hour away! He said that by the time we get

there, we would have to start getting ready for Fajr! I have to admit that I shared his concerns! However, Alhamdulillah the home we were staying at was only ten minutes away and so as soon as we got there we all went to our rooms.

I can only speak for myself, but I know that as soon as I lay my head on my pillow, within moments I was sound asleep!

Inspection of Bait-un-Nasir Mosque and Mulaqats

The next day, on 19th June, the vast majority of the day was spent at the Bait-un-Nasir Mosque in Columbus. This was the only Ahmadiyya Mosque to be inaugurated in the United States during the Khilafat Centenary year of 2008. It was situated on a large plot of land and was very beautiful.

Upon arrival, Hazur conducted a brief inspection of the premises before going to his office to start Mulaqats. When he went inside there were no families or anyone ready and I could see that the Private Secretary and Security were fast becoming concerned at the lack of preparation. I could understand their concern because Hazur-Aqdas was in his office and his precious time was being wasted.

Alhamdulillah soon the local Jamaat managed to arrange the families and the Mulaqats began. The majority of people waiting were asked to sit in a large hall. On one side were men and on the other side of a partition were women and children.

Meeting with young Ahmadis in Columbus

I took out my laptop and started to do some work but quite often local Ahmadis of different ages would come up to me and start talking. I soon realised that due to their love of Khilafat they were keen to talk to me about Hazur and the Jamaat.

Some of their questions were quite straightforward such as asking me what work I did. Others asked questions that were harder to answer. For example some used to ask me what Hazur's opinion of the United States was, whilst others would question me about Hazur's daily routine or his views on various issues. To such questions I used to reply that *'If you really want to know the answer to this then you should ask Hazur yourself!'*

Some of the younger generation would often ask me my personal feelings about how it felt to work and live close to the Khalifa. I used to explain that being close to the Khalifa was truly priceless. I said that no worldly rewards or work could ever compare. I told them Hazur's love and warmth was such that it instilled a feeling of unparalleled happiness and contentment.

In terms of working with Hazur, I said that Hazur was very loving and forgiving. I had made many mistakes over the years. Never had Hazur reprimanded me in a harsh or severe manner. Instead Hazur would always guide me with a smile and with an affectionate tone.

I also spoke of how even though Hazur was so busy, he still gave guidance to every Department every step of the way. I said that I had seen so many times

that if a person followed his direction and guidance it always led to success, but wherever a person thought they could do something on their own it invariably led to mistakes.

I gave an example of Hazur's wisdom which I had witnessed myself. I said that some time ago I had informed Hazur that a council in the UK had made a policy that they would allow Muslim students to delay their examinations during Ramadan because it would be difficult for them to sit exams whilst fasting. I said that at the time I thought Hazur would be pleased to hear this story but on the contrary Hazur immediately said that this was a wrong policy that needed responding to.

Hazur said that such a policy gave the impression that Muslims wanted preferential treatment and also it gave the impression that young children were forced to fast during Ramadan. Therefore it could give the impression that, God forbid, Islam was a cruel religion.

Hazur dictated a letter and told me to send it to the Daily Mail who had printed the original article. As one of the most read newspapers in the UK getting a letter published is very difficult. But within half an hour of sending the letter by email I received a call from the Daily Mail saying they were so impressed by the letter that they wished to publish it as their '*Letter of the Day*' and then a few days later I received a gift from them in recognition that it was now considered '*Letter of the Week*'.

Based on my experiences I told the young Ahmadis that the key to success was to follow Hazur's guidance no matter what. There could be times when Hazur's

decision was different to what you had hoped, but as soon as his guidance was received it ought to be accepted with full confidence and contentment.

From their part I found the Ahmadi youth in America to hold very mature and loving feelings towards Khilafat. Often, I would speak to children who were eleven or twelve or young teenagers and the way they would speak about Khilafat was genuinely astonishing, especially given that many of them had never met Hazur personally and had only seen him on MTA.

For example one boy said to me that he felt so lucky to be born in an era where there was *true* Khilafat to guide him, particularly considering that for 1300 years the world did not have this blessing.

Another boy said that the unity of the Jamaat under Khilafat was something he truly appreciated when he saw how divided other groups were.

One boy, who had a Mulaqat later in the day, said he had never met Hazur before but he already knew that when he met him, it would inspire him to be a better person and to spread the message of Ahmadiyyat to the corners of the earth.

Another boy spoke of the 'light' of Khilafat and that it was an institution that was incomparable to all else. He said *'How can I describe Khilafat when it is truly unique?'*

These were just a few of the comments of some of the young Atfal and Khuddam I met whilst in America. The way they talked about Khilafat was a

further sign in favour of the truth of Ahmadiyyat. Such love could only be instilled by Allah in people so young.

An example of true love for Khilafat

One person I met in Columbus had travelled with his family from Detroit to meet with Hazur. Detroit was around 3 hours drive and so they had left very early in the morning. He had been told that his name was on the list of Mulaqats but upon arrival he was suddenly told that his name was no longer on the list. Nevertheless he was advised that he and his family could wait if they wished in case later in the day there was a space.

After narrating the situation he said that he hoped and prayed that he would get the chance to meet Hazur. However there was no bitterness or anger that he and his family had travelled and now they were being told that they could not meet Hazur. I sat with him for around half an hour and we spoke about various things but every few minutes the talk would return to Khilafat.

At the end of our talk I prayed that he would get the chance to meet Hazur but as the day passed the chances looked less and less likely. Finally at around 9pm he was told that as it was getting close to Maghreb and Isha time he would not be able to meet with Hazur. I felt so sorry for him as I could see the disappointment on his face. But again he did not say anything to protest or display any anger.

I prayed again that somehow he be able to meet Hazur and I am sure that he too was praying for this. Suddenly an announcement came that those who had been left waiting would not be able to meet Hazur in the office but they could line up and do *Musafa* as Hazur left for Namaz. My heart was filled with joy and so I immediately made sure that the person knew and was ready. Thus

when Hazur emerged from his office my friend was able to do *Musafa* and the look of joy on his face was something that filled my heart with happiness.

To the outside world it would have seemed strange that after waiting all day in the heat, why a person could be so happy after a brief handshake. But not to Ahmadis. For he just wanted to have the opportunity to see Hazur from close and to touch his blessed hand. When he was able to do this, you could see that in an instant he had been consumed with contentment and satisfaction, Masha'Allah.

Departure from Ohio and visit to Pittsburgh

On 20th June 2012 we left Ohio and embarked on the next part of the tour.

It was a day that I was looking forward to a lot as we were travelling to the Jamaat Headquarters at Baitur Rahman in Maryland. I had visited USA on a few occasions over the past couple of years for Jamaat conferences and so I had visited Baitur Rahman on a number of occasions. Relatively speaking, Baitur Rahman felt like a home within the USA for me!

Before reaching Maryland we had one major stop to make and that was to the Nur Mosque in Pittsburgh which was around three hours drive from Columbus.

Before arriving at the Nur Mosque, Hazur-Aqdas and the Qafila stopped for a few minutes at a cemetery in Pittsburgh where a number of distinguished Ahmadis had been buried.

Hazur prayed at the grave of Mirza Munawar Ahmad Sahib, who was an Ahmadi Missionary posted to Pittsburgh in the 1940s and who had passed away in the city after developing an illness.

Speaking to local Jamaat members I found that they had a great sense of appreciation in their hearts for Mirza Munawar Ahmad Sahib and for the sacrifices he made for the sake of the local Jamaat. Even people who had been born well after his passing spoke with great reverence about him.

Hearing the stories reminded me that a person who is righteous and who sincerely serves Allah's Jamaat is never forgotten and this is one of the real beauties of our Ahmadiyya Jamaat.

The graveyard was the most beautifully designed graveyard I had ever seen. It had small rolling hills, pure green grass and had been very well maintained.

We returned to the car after a few minutes to proceed to the Mosque.

Throughout the tour Sakawat Bajwa Sahib and Bashir Sahib sat in the same car as me, whilst in the USA our driver was a Khadim by the name of Waqas Sahib.

I am relatively quiet but I used to very much enjoy the car conversations.

Sakawat Sahib would keep us entertained with jokes and stories, whilst Bashir Sahib would tell us interesting facts or comment upon the latest news stories.

As we left the cemetery that day Bashir Sahib informed us that in America you could only rent graves for a period of time and then families would have to pay more money to rent them for a further period.

I was quite shocked to hear this and so without thinking I commented that: *'In America nobody is allowed to rest in peace!'* Hearing this Bashir Sahib, Sakawat Sahib and Waqas Sahib started laughing a lot and found it a very funny comment. I was left feeling happy that in the tour I had managed to make at least one joke, even though my comment had initially been made in all seriousness!

We arrived at the Nur Mosque in Pittsburgh at around 2pm. Once again there were hundreds of Ahmadis to welcome Hazur. Normally on such occasions I try and go stand near to Hazur-Aqdas so that if he gives any particular direction to the local Jamaat then I can note it down. However on this one occasion my mind was elsewhere.

The reason being was that a few hours earlier, we had stopped at a petrol station for a few minutes. The temperature was extremely hot and suffocating and so when Sadr Sahib Khuddam-ul-Ahmadiyya, Rizwan Alladin, offered me and Waqas bhai a smoothie we could not reject. I took the smoothie, which was very large, back to the car and within a few minutes I had drunk the entire cup. And so by the time we arrived at the Mosque I was desperate to use the bathroom! Truly the last hour or so of the journey had been extremely difficult!

Therefore on this one occasion, rather than make notes I ran and asked a local Khadim if he could show me where the bathroom was which he kindly did.

Afterwards I narrated the story to Waqas bhai and he said that when travelling in a Qafila you should never drink a large cup quickly otherwise you are bound to face difficulty, rather you should take a sip or two every half an hour. It was good advice and something I followed for the rest of the tour and in all seriousness I learnt a good lesson on that day!

After Zuhr and Asr prayers and lunch, Hazur met with the local Ahmadis in Mulaqat. Many of them were African-American and as they left Hazur's office one by one their faces were gleaming with joy.

As we witnessed those scenes, the local President of the Jamaat, Omar Shaheed Sahib, also an African-American, said to me that he had no doubt that even though Hazur's visit to Pittsburgh was only for a couple of hours it would lead to an everlasting change in the Jamaat and would be a means of spiritually charging all of the Ahmadis, Insha'Allah.

Arrival at Baitur Rahman, Maryland

We arrived at Baitur Rahman at 9pm and it was one of the most electrifying moments of the entire tour. There were around 2,000 Ahmadis there to welcome Hazur-Aqdas and the love and passion which they displayed was something I will not forget.

The *naaray* were not just loud but were heartfelt; the tears were not manufactured but were pure bursts of emotion and the beauty of the Nazms were not just in the melodious tunes but because those who recited them meant every single word.

When I saw this welcome it occurred to me that whilst Hazur had been in the USA for four days, many of the Ahmadis could not believe it until they had seen it with their own eyes. Upon finally seeing that the Khalifa really was amongst them released such a loving and emotional reaction.

It was only the second tour of the United States made by Hazur-Aqdas since he became Khalifa in 2003 and it was clear that the local Ahmadis held a desperate longing for their beloved Imam to be amongst them.

After a break for twenty minutes, Hazur-Aqdas came to the Mosque to lead the Maghreb and Isha prayers. The Mosque and its surrounding halls were packed. Throughout Namaz I felt extremely hot and was sweating a great deal. I kept thinking perhaps it was only me who felt so hot but then as Namaz ended I saw the faces of the other Ahmadis nearby and all were fanning themselves or wiping sweat away from their foreheads.

It turned out that there was a problem with the AC. Given the warm temperature and the fact that the Mosque was packed, the temperature inside the Mosque had become extremely hot. The problems with the AC lasted a couple of days and during that time I used to think of Hazur-Aqdas wearing a *Paghri* and *Achkan* and how hot he must feel. Thankfully the problem was resolved after a couple of days just in time for Jumma.

There are a number of different houses and properties on the Baitur Rahman site and so after dinner, I was shown to the room where I was staying. It was at the home of Mukhtar Mali Sahib and was the same house where Hazur-Aqdas stayed during his visit in 2008. Abdul Majid Tahir Sahib was also staying in the house as well as many members of the USA Jamaat.

Before going to sleep I asked Mukhtar Sahib what time Fajr was and he replied 4.40am and so I set my alarm accordingly and went to sleep. Sometime later I woke up myself and checked the clock and it was 5am! My alarm had either not worked or I had slept through it. I jumped up and did Wudhu but by the time I was ready I saw that people had started coming back from the Mosque already and that I had missed Fajr. And so I offered Fajr Salaat in my room on my own. But for the rest of the day I felt very guilty and upset, that whilst I was fortunate enough to accompany Hazur-Aqdas, yet I had not woken up on time for Fajr. I resolved to make sure that it would not happen again and so for the rest of the tour I set a number of alarms to make sure I was up in good time and Masha'Allah I did not have this problem again.

Programmes at Baitur Rahman

After arriving at Baitur Rahman late on 20th June, we stayed for just over a week until 28th June. For the first time on the tour there was not much travelling for a few days at least. In fact the only time we left the Baitur Rahman complex during the entire week was on the 27th when Hazur-Aqdas went to address a function arranged at Capitol Hill in Washington DC.

One thing being in Hazur's Qafila certainly teaches is self-discipline. During that week many friends and relatives often invited me to visit them or encouraged me to go shopping or do some tourist activities. They would say that there must be some free time. I cannot deny that on a couple of occasions I was tempted and thought for a few moments that *'I am personally free for couple of hours now so perhaps I could go out and see some of the local area or visit a friend'*.

But whenever such thoughts entered my mind I used to remind myself that I was part of Hazur's entourage and was not there for pleasure but for work. If I had sought permission to leave the premises for an hour or two, I probably would have gained it but I knew that in my heart that I would feel anxious and restless at having left my duty.

Whilst those thoughts did enter my mind in the first few days, over the course of the tour they became less and less. Indeed by the end of the tour I had no desire to go out on any personal activity, my genuine desire was to stay with the Qafila at all times.

In this respect I did feel that I was able to develop a self-discipline which was another blessing of travelling with the Khalifa, Alhamdulillah.

I can also say that I never once saw any of the other staff and security members who travelled with Hazur-Aqdas from London display any frustration or desire to visit family or to see the local cities.

The fact that we were remaining on the Baitur Rahman complex for the vast majority of our stay in Maryland did not mean that there was not much activity taking place, in fact quite the contrary.

The schedule of Hazur-Aqdas each day was completely full. From morning until evening each day Hazur's schedule would involve meeting countless Ahmadi families in Mulaqat; various Amila meetings took place; classes with Waqf-e-Nau and Waqfat-e-Nau; classes with Ahmadi male and female students and hundreds of children were able to do their *Aameens* with Hazur-Aqdas. These were just a few of the many internal programmes during that week.

Furthermore, a number of non-Ahmadi dignitaries visited the Mosque to meet Hazur during the course of the week.

Hazur-Aqdas also used to receive countless letters, both personal and official, each day which he used to read and reply to.

I myself used to send official letters to Hazur almost every day in which I would request his guidance or approval for various things related to my work. Each letter would return the next day or in some instances the very same day.

Sometimes Hazur-Aqdas would tick and sign the letters to acknowledge that he had read them and to approve whatever I had submitted, whilst on some came handwritten notes and instructions. The same process was undertaken for all other letters that Hazur received.

Many of us who were present used to sit in genuine astonishment at how one man could undertake so much work. With absolute conviction I can say that no other man could fulfil such intense and relentless schedules. I say that not as an Ahmadi who loves the Khalifa, but leaving that aside and looking entirely impartially, I have no doubt in my mind that the amount of time and energy Hazur-Aqdas devotes for his Jamaat will not be equalled by any other person, in any organisation throughout the world.

Of course Hazur-Aqdas is a human being but it is due to Allah's support that he is able to sustain such relentless levels of work. The other reason I believe that Hazur-Aqdas is able to sustain such high levels of work is because of his unparalleled love for the Jamaat. Meeting hundreds of Ahmadis daily, reading their letters, giving them guidance is not just a duty but something that the Khalifa enjoys due to his consummate love for the Jamaat. He is truly selfless, whereby his happiness comes from the happiness of others. The Khalifa feels the joy of his fellow Ahmadis as though it was his own joy and conversely feels the pain of his fellow Ahmadis as though it was his pain.

On a personal level I was pleased when my wife arrived at Baitur Rahman on 25th June with her parents. For the next couple of days they would come in the evenings at Maghreb and Isha time. After Namaz I would bring two plates of food to a bench just outside the Mosque and we would both sit and eat our

evening meal together. During those few minutes I would tell her about the events of that day or previous days on the tour.

I would often mention the Ahmadis who came for Mulaqat and their feelings of joy after meeting with Hazur. I used to tell her how on a daily basis I would see dozens of grown men and women with tears rolling down their faces, unable to control their emotions after meeting with Hazur.

An example of the love of Ahmadis for Khilafat

There is little doubt that every Ahmadi in the USA would have loved to have the opportunity to meet with Hazur personally in Mulaqat during the tour. However due to time constraints some people were unable to meet him and certainly the disappointment they felt was natural. Nevertheless, all such people who I met never displayed any anger or resentment.

One such person, Naveed Malik described to me how he felt after learning that he would not have the opportunity to meet Hazur personally and how he reacted. He said:

“Weeks after receiving approval, and the day prior to Mulaqat, I received a call from Markaz saying that since I had met Hazur-e-Anwar (aba) last year, I would not have Mulaqat tomorrow. Undoubtedly my wife and I were disappointed, but we quickly concluded that the true blessing was the many opportunities we availed to pray behind Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih (aba). We were in Hazur's (aba) sublime presence for nearly two weeks, and this strengthened our weak hearts. It gave us focus. It inspired us.”

My entire family has been regularly offering their five daily prayers separately since Hazur's admonition, my wife has accelerated her study and hifz of the Holy Quran, my sister has begun wearing hijab, and Ahmadis in and near Zion have reawakened to their Tabligh duties. Alhamdulillah. Hazur's visit has changed our lives, and it is as if Hazur-e-Anwar (aba) continues to bless us with his presence in America.”

Friday Sermon at Baitur Rahman

Another historic aspect of this tour occurred on 22 June 2012 when Hazur-Aqdas delivered the Friday Sermon at Baitur Rahman. This was the first time Hazur had delivered a Sermon from the USA National Jamaat Headquarters.

Each week Ahmadis across the world watch Hazur's Friday Sermon on MTA or on the internet and so wherever the Sermon is being delivered from becomes the focal point for the entire worldwide Jamaat.

The American Ahmadis had watched for many years Hazur's sermons in various other countries and so the sense of pride and honour they felt was quite apparent that the eyes of the Ahmadi world would be on *their* national Mosque and that they would be the ones who were sitting directly in front of Hazur-Aqdas, whilst the rest of the world watched from afar.

Hazur's Sermon focused on the importance of Salat. This was a subject that Hazur had spoken about at length on countless occasions throughout the world. Listening to Hazur's words reinforced to me the fundamental nature of Namaz and how it did not matter what part of the world Ahmadis were living in, this was the number one priority that our Khalifa wanted us to focus on.

Interview with Dan Merica CNN

On 22 June 2012 a few hours after Jumma prayers, Hazur-Aqdas met with Dan Merica a well-respected journalist working for CNN.

Just before Hazur arrived in the room I had the opportunity to speak to the journalist. I often find that some dignitaries or journalists who come to meet Hazur do not have a proper understanding of the importance of Khilafat and what the Khalifa means to all Ahmadis.

Consequently in those few minutes I tried to convey to Dan Merica what Khilafat really was. I said our Jamaat could claim to be the only truly united organisation in the world because there was no other organisation or religion that truly believed in one leader and was willing to follow whatever he said.

Khilafat, I said, was not a dictatorship because we willingly obeyed and accepted the Khalifa. We did this because of our belief that he is Allah's representative on earth, chosen by Allah to continue the mission of the Promised Messiah (als).

Sometimes when giving such briefings to journalists it appears to go over their heads or they do not seem to comprehend the love and attachment the Jamaat feels to the Khalifa. But on this particular occasion I did feel that the journalist was both surprised and impressed by the love Ahmadis held for the institution of Khilafat.

After a few minutes Hazur-Aqdas arrived and the interview commenced in English and lasted for around 20minutes.

The journalist asked a range of questions and particularly the objectives underlying Hazur's visit. Hazur said that the major purpose was to meet with Ahmadis living in the USA and to guide them. He said he would meet them both individually but also address them collectively at the Jalsa Salana.

The journalist brought up Hazur's impending visit to Capitol Hill and asked how important it was to Hazur. I could he was astonished by Hazur's answer, because Hazur said simply it was not his priority – his priority remained meeting the Ahmadis.

Nonetheless, Hazur did say that the Capitol Hill function was important to the extent that it was a good platform for the Jamaat to build contacts and for him to present the peaceful teachings of Islam to the leaders of the United States.

Publication of interview on CNN website

After the interview, the local USA Jamaat assured us that the journalist would write up a story and place it on the CNN website within the next couple of days.

However this was not the case and as the days passed I began to think that it was becoming increasingly unlikely that he would write an article about the interview. I personally was becoming increasingly disappointed.

My disappointment was thankfully misplaced as ultimately he did write up a story that was published on the CNN website on 7th July 2012, a few days after Hazur had left the USA and continued his tour in Canada.

The article appeared on the front page of the CNN website with a large picture of Hazur and therefore was immediately accessible and visible to the hundreds of thousands of people who check the CNN website daily.

The article also commented on Hazur's address to Capitol Hill on 27 June which the journalist had also covered.

In the article Dan Merica had written the headline was:

'Islamic Sect has appealing message for US politicians but has global enemies'

Merica went onto write in his article:

“You’ve almost certainly never heard of him, but Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad drew some serious star power at a recent Capitol Hill reception in his honour...

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and Republican Sen. John Cornyn were among the many lawmakers who showed up to meet Ahmad, a Muslim leader who was in town last week on a rare U.S. visit from London.

At a time when the United States is struggling with its views about Islam – as Islamists gain power in the Middle East and with on-going concerns about Quran-citing terrorists – it’s not hard to see Ahmad’s appeal to both parties. As he said in his Capitol Hill speech, he has “love for all, hatred for none.”

It’s a sentiment that Sen. Robert Casey, Democrat of Pennsylvania, echoed in introducing Ahmad, praising the “leadership you have shown to tolerance and to peace.”

It’s not just Ahmad who espouses his can’t-we-all-get-along read on Islam. The 61-year-old is the spiritual leader of the global Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, whose friendliness toward the West and whose criticism of other Muslims has earned the sect allies at the highest level of the U.S government, even as it faces mortal enemies in other parts of the world...

Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, who leads an international Ahmadi community is the sect’s fifth Khalifa, or leader.

The group claims tens of millions of followers around the world, but outside experts say the number is smaller, in the millions.

For Ahmad and his followers, their relatively small sect is the real face of Islam, which has more than a billion followers around the world.

“It is time that we, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, should give the real and true picture of Islam,” Ahmad said in an interview inside the Silver Spring mosque. “I will always be talking about peace. That peace is not from myself or some new teaching but it is the true, real teaching which I gather and get from the Holy Quran.”

“Nowadays, Islam is being targeted only because of so-called Muslim groups who claim themselves to be Muslims but are not following the true teachings of Islam,” Ahmad said, speaking of what he calls “fundamentalists Muslims.”

“If it is that Islam that is being portrayed by those orthodox Muslims, then I don’t think there is any chance in spreading Islam.”

Meetings with other dignitaries

During the course of the week at Baitur Rahman, Hazur-Aqdas met with a number of other dignitaries. This included Daniel Ohene Agyekum, Ghana's Ambassador to the USA. The ambassador seemed truly delighted to visit Hazur at Baitur Rahman and the meeting was very friendly and warm. Both Hazur and the Ambassador shared memories of Ghana and the Ambassador was struck by how much Hazur knew about Ghana.

Another meeting was with Alejandro Beutel, who was a young Muslim, who worked for MPAC, which is a national group representing Muslims in the USA. I and a few others met with him before and after Hazur met with him and he was very confident, to the point of perhaps being even a little over-confident. But when Hazur entered his attitude was very different and you could see in his eyes that he was awestruck by Hazur's presence. Indeed he admitted as much after Hazur had departed the meeting.

Hazur was also visited by Tim Lenderking, the Director of Pakistan Affairs at the United States State Department. This was a very sober and detailed discussion in which Mr Lenderking spoke about his contact with Pakistani officials and asked Hazur how the USA could assist Ahmadis.

Hazur-Aqdas spoke in detail about the difficulties faced by Ahmadis in Pakistan and the lack of peace they had in their daily lives.

Hazur spoke about the need for Ahmadis to be granted voting rights that were free and not based on them having to, God forbid, class themselves as either

non-Muslim on the one hand or on the other hand to disassociate themselves from the Promised Messiah (als).

Similar discussions were also held with Congressman Michael Honda and Congresswoman Jackie Speier.

Hazur-Aqdas also met with a group of US military chaplains. As Hazur mentioned in a Friday Sermon after the tour concluded, one of the chaplains asked Hazur if he was nervous at the thought of having to speak in front of many political leaders at Capitol Hill the next day.

Hazur-Aqdas remarked that he was not nervous and the reason for this was that whatever he planned to say was based on the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. Hazur-Aqdas said that wherever he went in the world, he limited himself to the words of the Qur'an, and because of that he had no reason to be fearful or nervous in front of any audience.

You could see that the chaplain who asked the question was visibly impressed by the total belief and confidence that Hazur had in the text of the Holy Qur'an, Masha'Allah.

Capitol Hill

I have been fortunate to have attended many wonderful events over the past few years which have been graced by Hazur-Aqdas. Nonetheless it is my honest belief that 27 June 2012 will be remembered as a truly historic day for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat.

It was the day that Hazur-Aqdas made an historic address in the Gold Room of Capitol Hill entitled: *“The Path to Peace: Just Relations between Nations.”* Due to many reasons it is a day that I, and those who were present, will surely never forget.

For quite a few months before this event I had heard a lot about the event at Capitol Hill from members of the USA Jamaat who were involved in its planning and organisation.

Well in advance of Hazur’s tour Amjad Khan, the National Umur-e-Kharija Secretary, contacted me and sought my advice on a number of issues regarding the event.

One major issue was the type of event the Jamaat should hold. Should it be in a hotel with very local guests or should it be held at the offices of a think tank where academics could attend?

Another alternative he mentioned was to hold it at Capitol Hill. Although this sounded appealing he admitted that it was a very risky idea because it was

extremely difficult to get politicians to attend such functions for more than ten or fifteen minutes.

A further question Amjad raised was what *type* of audience should be invited.

I have learnt over the past few years to seek Hazur's guidance wherever possible. Sometimes you may expect or even hope for one thing but Hazur may give instructions or guidance that is different to what you were anticipating. Yet invariably in the long run it has always been proven that Hazur's guidance has born the most fruit and led to great success.

Thus when Amjad asked me those questions I took them to Hazur to seek his guidance. Immediately Hazur said that they could hold the event wherever they pleased but that they should strive to invite a true cross-section of society, including politicians, academics, diplomats, think tanks etc. I relayed this back to Amjad and thereafter he and his team truly worked towards fulfilling Hazur's directives, Masha'Allah.

Despite all of their hard work until the very last moment Amjad and his team were concerned about multiple issues. There were issues of security checking, there were concerns that a number of politicians may at the last minute choose not attend, there were issues of some who said they could only attend for a few minutes and many other matters that were causing anxiety.

I myself was very worried because such a high profile event was being held in the USA for the very first time and there was this nagging feeling in the back of

my mind that God forbid something happens during the event not in keeping with the honour and dignity of Khilafat.

I was though reassured by the knowledge that Allah would Insha'Allah protect Khilafat at all times.

On 27 June 2012 Hazur's Qafila left Baitur Rahman at 8.30am and headed towards Washington DC. I was sat at the back of a 7-seater and our car was directly behind Hazur's car.

Apart from our driver, also in our car were Private Secretary Munir Javed Sahib, Abdul Majid Tahir Sahib, Mirza Waqas Ahmad Sahib and Sakawat Bajwa Sahib.

All the way to Capitol Hill I could feel a tension amongst all of us. We were all very quiet, with hardly a single word being spoken throughout the 45minute journey.

With Allah's Grace however from the moment we arrived it was apparent that Allah's Help was there to protect the honour of Khilafat.

For example, the USA Jamaat had been informed very strictly by the Capitol Hill protocol officers that only Hazur-Aqdas would be exempt from security checking. They said it was an absolute rule that nobody could enter Capitol Hill without going through full scanning and security.

We were all prepared for this and had even brought our passports along as an extra form of identification but when we arrived the security people just waved us through and we were all able to enter without any obstruction or delay. It was truly unbelievable.

I have since been told that just a few months previously the Dalai Lama visited Capitol Hill and he was made to go through the full security procedure, yet due to the blessings of Khilafat we were all able to walk through without any checking.

Hazur-Aqdas was immediately guided to a small office where he was greeted by Senator Robert Casey and Congressman Bradley Sherman with Congressman Michael Honda joining after a few moments.

I was stood at the side of the room and it was fascinating to observe the respect and reverence with which Hazur-Aqdas was received by the American politicians.

These were all national political figures in the United States and Capitol Hill was their political home, yet it was quite clear that in Hazur's company they were quite overawed.

On the other hand, despite the fact that it was Hazur's first ever visit to Capitol Hill he controlled the conversation in the most exemplary and dignified manner. Hazur-Aqdas asked them questions and answered some of theirs with serenity and calm.

After about fifteen minutes the initial meeting concluded and Hazur was then escorted to the Gold Room where the main event was to take place.

As we entered, I saw that the room was completely packed to the brim, to the extent that some guests were left standing on the sides. When Hazur entered all those who were seated spontaneously rose to their feet as a mark of respect.

Hazur was led to the main table where he was seated with members of Congress and other dignitaries.

The rest of the room was also filled with dignitaries from various sectors of society. In all there were 30 members of Congress, members of the diplomatic corps, human rights leaders and university academics. Also in attendance were, representatives from religious communities, think tanks and the media.

I was told afterwards that at least 119 high level guests attended and that many more would have come but for the lack of space.

Whoever I met spoke with great shock at the number of members of Congress who attended. They all said that for such functions it was virtually impossible to get more than eight or nine members of Congress and even then they only came for ten or fifteen minutes. Yet for the event graced by Hazur-Aqdas there were 30, the vast majority of whom stayed for the entire event which lasted for more than one hour.

Perhaps the most high profile of the non-Ahmadi guests at the event was the current Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, who until a few months previously was Speaker of the House and thus occupied the highest political office of any woman in the history of the United States.

Over the past few years I had seen her on TV often and so I was looking forward to hearing her speak. She came across as friendly and warm and her speech was well written.

She spoke of her respect for Hazur-Aqdas. She called him a leader of '*wisdom and compassion*'. She also said that despite the persecution faced by the Jamaat:

"His Holiness has refused to turn to bitterness or vengeance."

When I heard her speak this line I was pleased because it proved that the peaceful and loving message of Khalifa-tul Masih had reached the highest echelons of the United States Government. This particular line also got widespread media coverage in the American press and media..

It was clear to me that seeing and listening to Hazur-Aqdas had a positive effect on Nancy Pelosi. I looked directly towards her a number of times during Hazur's speech and you could see she was genuinely listening with intent. Indeed a few days later, whilst Hazur-Aqdas was in Harrisburg for the Jalsa Salana, a handwritten letter was received from her by Hazur in which she spoke about her pleasure at meeting him. In the letter she spoke frankly about the blessings she felt she had received from meeting with Hazur.

There were many other guests speakers at the event who all spoke with admiration for the Jamaat and for Hazur-Aqdas.

One speech that I also appreciated was given by Dr Katrina Lantoss-Swett, the Chairwoman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Listening to her it was clear that she had a real passion for human rights and religious freedom. It was also clear that she had a good understanding of the persecution faced by the Jamaat and that she felt real sympathy.

It was her comments about Hazur that pleased me the most. Her respect was apparent as she said:

“I have to say that there is a particular sense of blessing that seems to rest on this brimming room today and I am sure that that’s due in part to the wonderful spirit of goodwill, the warm hearts and sense of optimism and love of the participants. But, Your Holiness, it is undoubtedly a reflection of the blessing that you bring to this Capitol. And so we are honoured and so grateful to have you here.”

After the various guest speeches at around 10.30am Hazur-Aqdas took to the podium to address the audience. As he stood the audience once again stood together in unison as a mark of respect.

It was clear that there was a deep sense of interest and curiosity in the audience about what Hazur-Aqdas would say.

I am sure many of them will have heard the words of Muslim leaders or authorities in the past but they will never have had the opportunity to listen to the words of a Muslim leader who could genuinely claim to represent his entire Community globally.

Hazur's address was truly inspiring. It was a narration of real Islamic teachings based purely on the Holy Qur'an.

If the audience had thought that Hazur would come and praise the United States and the West and be intimidated by Capitol Hill then they were mistaken.

Whilst others may have been overawed by the audience and the setting, Hazur-Aqdas spoke with surety and confidence about the beauty of Islam.

As I listened to Hazur's words I was reminded of the meeting he had held the previous day at Baitur Rahman with a number of military chaplains and how Hazur had said that he did not feel nervous because he knew that whatever he would say was based on the true teachings of the Holy Qur'an.

The confidence Hazur had in the Holy Qur'an was such that no place on earth could, God forbid, overawe him because he knew that his weapon, the Divine Word, was All Powerful and Universal.

The main theme of Hazur's address was world peace and the need for just relations between nations.

At the very beginning Hazur clearly informed the audience about what his primary source was. Hazur said:

“Everything that I will say in relation to establishing peace and in relation to conducting just international relations, will be based on Qur’anic teachings.”

Without any fear Hazur-Aqdas spoke of the failure of international organisations such as the ‘League of Nations’ and in terms of the modern day Hazur spoke of the inequality that existed at the United Nations.

He said that some countries were given preferential treatment, but that the Qur’an and the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) both taught that all men and all women were born equal and nationality was a means of recognition rather than a means of superiority.

Hazur-Aqdas spoke about how rich and powerful nations were exploiting the weak and deprived nations of the world and preventing them from progressing. He said that this was not only unjust but was leading to negative reaction from those who were oppressed and so naturally the peace of the world was disturbed as resentment took hold.

He said that rich nations often dealt with corrupt leaders so long as their own interests were observed. All of this was leading to a lack of trust.

Towards the end of his speech, Hazur summarised the means for peace. Hazur said:

“Islam has drawn our attention to the means for peace: It requires absolute justice. It requires truthful testimony to always be given. It requires that our glances are not cast enviously in the direction of the wealth of others. And it requires that the developed nations, put aside their own vested interests, and instead help and serve the less developed and poorer nations with a truly selfless attitude and spirit. If all of these factors are observed then true peace will be established.”

Hazur concluded his speech by challenging the leaders of the USA to act.

Hazur said:

“And so the United States, as the world’s largest power, should play its role in acting with true justice and with such good intentions as I have described. If it does so then the world will always remember with great admiration your great efforts. It is my prayer that this hope becomes a reality.”

As Hazur concluded the entire audience rose to their feet once again. I cannot remember seeing or hearing of any other function where a person was given three separate standing ovations within the space of an hour.

Certainly I am sure that a Muslim leader will never have been given such respect at Capitol Hill before as Hazur-Aqdas was afforded on that day.

Thereafter, Hazur met with some of the guests but due to time constraints many were left unable to meet. I was later informed that after hearing Hazur's words many had felt a keen desire to meet with him personally and were disappointed that they were unable to do so.

Many of the dignitaries commented about how impressed they were with Hazur's countenance and his address.

Only Allah knows if the effect on all of them will be long lasting or merely temporary, but I am personally quite sure that amongst the 120 or so guests there must have been some who would seriously contemplate upon the importance of Hazur's message.

Tour of Capitol Hill

After the formal part of the Capitol Hill event was concluded, Hazur was given a tour of the entire Capitol Hill building by Congressman Gary Peters.

I really enjoyed this part of the day because we had seen that Allah had answered our prayers and the main event had gone really well and so now was an opportunity to enjoy the tour and to spend further time in the blessed company of Hazur.

I sensed that this feeling of relief and happiness was not limited to me but was widespread amongst the Ahmadis who were there.

We left the Gold Room and were directed towards a tram. There must have been at least thirty of us and as we approached the tram I heard a security guard shout 'Stop!' in an aggressive manner. At that time I thought that one or some of our party were about to get in trouble. I turned around to see who he was admonishing and to my utter surprise it was none of us but a staff member who was with one of the Congressman!

Thus once again we were all able to get through without any security checking and the only person who was stopped was a regular staff member who probably spent most days within the Capitol Hill building!

Hazur-Aqdas, the guide and a few local Jamaat members sat in the first carriage of the tram. I was in the second with other Qafila members. The tram

journey was only a couple of minutes and took us to the main part of Capitol Hill from where the tour began.

Congressman Peters showed Hazur various rooms and explained their history.

Soon we arrived at the famous Rotunda which is the large dome of Capitol Hill that is famous around the world. The Congressman explained that on the walls were different paintings depicting various stages of American history.

As we stood in the exact centre point of Capitol Hill, I noticed that many tourists of different ages had taken out their cameras and were pointing them towards Hazur. Looking at them their fascination and curiosity was quite apparent. I felt the moment had symbolic value, whereby at the very centre of the world's largest political power, it was not the President or any other politician who took centre stage on that day, but it was Allah's Representative, the Khalifa of the Promised Messiah (as).

The tour concluded as Hazur was led to the House of Representatives which was in session. We all sat in a viewing gallery and watched as the normal proceedings of Congress continued.

I was not aware there was to be any reference to Hazur or the Jamaat and so it was a very pleasant surprise when after some time Congressman Bradley Sherman was called to the podium by the acting Speaker and he warmly welcomed Hazur-Aqdas to the United States on behalf of the United States Congress.

Congressman Sherman mentioned that earlier an Official Resolution had been adopted by Congress welcoming Hazur to Washington DC in which it had recognised Hazur's *'commitment to world peace, justice, nonviolence, human rights, religious freedom and democracy'*.

Upon making this announcement Congressman Sherman pointed to where Hazur was sat in the gallery so that all members could see Hazur. Hazur-Aqdas graciously stood and waved towards the members of Congress.

I was later informed that after meeting Hazur earlier in the day, Senator Robert Casey had referred to Hazur as *'humble and masterful'*. And when Hazur stood to acknowledge the audience both of these qualities were quite apparent. His absolute humility was there for all to see, yet in spite of it his presence had illuminated the entire room, Masha'Allah.

I personally felt great satisfaction and happiness that the United States legislature had shown such respect and warmth to Hazur-Aqdas. Indeed the entire day's programme pointed to the special and direct Help of Allah the Almighty. The blessings we witnessed in those few hours were truly exceptional.

All of our prayers had been accepted by Allah, but most importantly the prayers of Hazur-Aqdas had been accepted in the most glorious manner. For, upon returning to London a few weeks later, in his Friday Sermon of 20 July 2012, Hazur spoke about how on the way to Capitol Hill he had prayed for the success of the event. Hazur said that he had particularly prayed that as he was there to represent the Promised Messiah (as), that Allah again fulfil the

promise that He had made to the Promised Messiah of helping him with the power of prestige and awe.

All those who were witness to the event will attest that indeed Allah did accept this prayer of Hazur. Despite being in the building which is considered a centre of world politics and power, throughout the visit, it was the Khalifa of the Age who held all attention and whose greatness was evident and apparent to all. *Alhamdolillah.*

When we finally returned to our car, the atmosphere was completely different to when we had left Baitur Rahman in the morning. Where that journey had been conducted in virtual silence, on the way back the spirits of all us were charged and emotional. The entire journey was spent talking about the blessings of Allah we had just witnessed and the glory of Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya.

Blessings of Capitol Hill – Emotions of Ahmadis

After the Capitol Hill event, Amjad Mahmood Khan, Secretary Umur-e-Kharija USA said to me that it had been a life changing experience for him. He added:

“Among the most indelible incidents of the tour -- and indeed of my entire life - was the manner in which Hazur (aba)'s presence at Capitol Hill transformed an ordinary PR event into an extraordinary divine sign from Allah.

After the event, I received many emails from the guests noting that in all their years of attending events at Capitol Hill, they had never seen so many lawmakers stay for an entire event during the middle of a work day. This result was entirely due to Hazur (aba)'s guidance and prayers.

Indeed on the day of the event, several incidents happen that were completely unplanned, unexpected and unexplained and can only be seen as miracles.

First, despite all of our best efforts, we could not secure a security waiver for Hazur (aba). We were told even on the night before the event that Hazur (aba) must go through security, and no exception can ever be made (not even for the Dalai Lama or Pope). But on the morning of the event, the Sergeant-at-Arms informed us that NO security would be required for Hazur (aba)'s entry -- not just for Hazur (aba) but for all of his entourage and staff.

In effect, Hazur (aba) was given "Head of State" status, which as far as I understand, has never been given to any religious leader in the history of Capitol Hill.

Second, we were informed as Hazur (aba) was walking in that U.S. Congressman Sherman had obtained permission for Hazur (aba) to enter the main House of Representatives gallery to be honoured with a floor statement.

Again, no one on our team, despite 6 months of planning, had ever even thought about asking for this honour -- it was instead bestowed upon Hazur (aba) literally as he walked in the halls of the building, and it was offered by the U.S. Congressman himself (without anyone asking him). Alhamdulillah suma Alhamdulillah."

Mahmood Ahmad, a member of the Umur-e-Kharija USA team said:

"As the Gold Room began to fill up on the morning of the 27th, I realized that the turnout would dwarf even the high end of our estimate; for instance, many members of Congress who had not confirmed their attendance were present, and some of them even stood in the rear of the room.

It is my estimate that over 150 non-Ahmadis were in attendance, even though the Gold Room only has a seating capacity of 110.

When Hazur-e-Aqdas rose to address the audience, it felt as though an electric current ran through the room, as many have observed.

On a personal note, when the crowd stood up in unison to welcome Hazur, I felt a distinct divine presence. In that moment, I felt immensely grateful to Allah that he allowed me to be a part, however small, of an immense historical milestone.”

Visit to Mubarak Mosque, Virginia

After departing from Capitol Hill, Hazur-Aqdas visited the Fazl Mosque in Washington DC. Although relatively small, it is a very beautiful and historic mosque, located in the heart of DC alongside embassies and consulates. For many years it served as the Headquarters of the USA Jamaat until Baitur Rahman was built. I personally was very fond of the Mosque having stayed there for a number of days during a visit to the United States in 2010.

We stayed at the Fazl Mosque for around fifteen minutes before the Qafila proceeded to Virginia where Hazur was to inspect the newly completed Mubarak Mosque.

For more than ten years I had heard about the Virginia Mosque project from relatives who live nearby. It had taken a very, very long time to construct and it was something the local Jamaat had desired for many years. When Hazur arrived, members of the local Jamaat were there to greet him, and the joy and relief on their faces was there for all to see.

The Mosque had not yet received its final permit from the local authorities and so an official reception could not be held, but Hazur inspected the entire building, whilst local Ahmadis distributed sweets in celebration.

After all the years of wait, Allah had blessed the Virginia Jamaat with a really beautiful Mosque, Masha'Allah.

Feeling unwell!

After Fajr on 28th June, I went back to bed to rest. However I soon woke up feeling extremely unwell due to a sudden stomach illness. I was sweating profusely, feeling very hot and was suffering from nausea. The next couple of hours were extremely difficult.

After feeling slightly better I got ready and went to the offices at around 10am. Despite the slight improvement the truth was I still did not feel very well at all. I was quite concerned because we were travelling to Harrisburg later and I knew that travelling whilst suffering from food poisoning was a recipe for disaster!

I did not tell anyone I was unwell because I did not want to make an issue or cause any worry. However after some time a friend casually asked me if I was feeling ok because many of the Qafila members had been struck down with food poisoning! When I heard this, I admitted that I too had been struck down.

I hardly ate anything all day and so Alhamdulillah, I survived the journey to Harrisburg without major distress!

Nonetheless, the main topic of conversation amongst the Qafila and the local Jamaat over the next 24 hours was which dish had caused everyone to be sick. There were a number of suspects but every time we reached a definitive conclusion somebody would say that he had not ate the accused dish and yet he too had become unwell!

We never could definitively say what made us unwell, however my own personal suspicion was a piece of barbecue chicken I had ate the night before.

At some point during the day Hazur-Aqdas also became aware that some of us had been unwell. I learnt this when Hazur asked one of the catering team that *'Aap nay to mehray qafilay walon ko bemar kardiya hai?'*

I was stood on the side and Hazur saw me and asked me if I was now feeling ok to which I replied that Masha'Allah I was feeling better.

It was another example of Hazur's love and care towards those who were accompanying him. Hazur had just arrived in Harrisburg for a very busy Jalsa period, yet he still found the time to ask how we were feeling and also in his own loving way he drew the attention of the local Jamaat towards the issue.

Journey to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and stop in Baltimore

We left Baitur Rahman at just before 4pm on 28th June.

The programme was we would spend the next three nights in Harrisburg before returning to Baitur Rahman on Sunday evening after Jalsa. As it transpired we were unable to return to Baitur Rahman and the rest of our stay in the United States was spent in Harrisburg.

During the journey to Harrisburg we stopped at Baltimore where the Jamaat had bought a property in a beautiful residential area.

The building itself was very attractive and another great blessing of Allah.

After a brief inspection by Hazur, the local President asked Hazur to name the building. Hazur gently reminded him that normally he was asked to name buildings in writing and after due consideration Hazur would make a decision.

However on this occasion Hazur agreed to make an exception to the normal rule and so enquired from the elders of the local Jamaat who was the first Ahmadi convert in the area. After some thought the elders said they believed the first convert was a man called 'Abdul Kareem' and so upon hearing this Hazur announced that the building would be named 'Baitul Kareem'.

As this was announced the local Ahmadis became extremely delighted and started raising slogans of '*Baitul Kareem Zindabad!*'

We arrived in Harrisburg late afternoon and went straight to the newly acquired Hadee Mosque, which was a property purchased by the Jamaat and converted into a Mosque.

After unveiling a plaque to mark the occasion, Hazur immediately led the Zuhr and Asr prayers, after which Hazur made a full inspection of the Mosque premises.

Jalsa Inspection

After departing from the Hadee Mosque we travelled to the nearby Expo Convention Centre for the Jalsa Salana inspection.

Hazur inspected both the men's and ladies side of Jalsa and gave due instructions as he walked by the various departments. Hazur also tasted food from the Langhar-Khana before proceeding to the main hall where Hazur gave a short address to the workers about the importance of offering their prayers on time throughout Jalsa and also the need for vigilance and security at all times.

After a silent prayer to conclude the session, Hazur returned to his chair on the stage. There were still ten minutes till Maghreb time and so I decided that it would be a good time to show Hazur some newspaper cuttings from the previous day's event at Capitol Hill.

I went and gave the cuttings to Hazur who read each one there and then. Hazur was interested to know the circulation of each of the newspapers. When I informed that one of the newspapers had made some factual errors, Hazur instructed they should be contacted and requested to correct them.

Whilst Hazur was viewing the cuttings he mentioned that he had heard that at the previous day's event at Capitol Hill, some Ahmadis had started clapping in the House of Representatives even though this was against the rules. I said that this was unfortunately true.

When Hazur heard this he said that it was very wrong that any act had been conducted contrary to the rules of Congress and thus I should pass on a message to the USA Jamaat that a letter should be sent apologising for this mistake.

This incident illustrated once again how particular Hazur is about respecting others and their procedures. Whilst others may have taken this issue fairly lightly and said that no harm was done as the Ahmadis were merely expressing their appreciation, Hazur took serious note of the matter and instructed that a formal apology be sent.

'Hotel of Ahmadis'

During our days in Harrisburg, Hazur-Aqdas and his Qafila stayed at the Sheraton Hotel which was about fifteen minutes drive from the Jalsa. Hazur-Aqdas stayed on the fifth floor, as did the rest of us who had travelled with him from London. It was certainly a great honour for me to be able to stay so close to Hazur and I am sure it was the same for others.

Apart from the Qafila and the members of the USA Jamaat who were travelling with Hazur, many rooms of the hotel were also booked by Ahmadis who had come for Jalsa. I did not realise quite how many until I came down for Fajr prayers on Friday morning. The Jamaat had booked a large room for Fajr and when I entered it was filled with dozens if not hundreds of Ahmadis, whilst an adjacent room was filled with Ahmadi women.

Jalsa Salana USA

The Jalsa of the USA was from 29th June to 1st July 2012. It was held at the Expo Centre in Harrisburg, which was the same location as the Jalsa of 2008.

Hazur-Aqdas delivered three speeches during the course of the Jalsa: the Friday Sermon, an address to Lajna Imaillah on Saturday and the concluding address on Sunday.

The Friday Sermon was of course in Urdu and like the previous week, a significant part of Hazur's sermon was about the importance of Salat.

Hazur said that in many houses people routinely combined the Zuhr and Asr prayers or the Maghreb and Isha prayers. Hazur reminded that permission to combine prayers was for certain occasions and not a matter of routine.

Hazur-Aqdas also spoke about the need to show love and compassion to one another, rather than to hold petty grievances.

Hazur's address to Lajna Imaillah on Saturday focused on two main topics, firstly that Ahmadi women should remember the pledge they have made with Allah and understand their true values.

And secondly Hazur spoke about the importance of Purdah.

One point that stuck in my mind was Hazur's emphasis on self-evaluation.

Hazur said that self-analysis, if done honestly, was the best reflector of a person's spiritual state. Listening to those words emphasised how easy it was to make yourself believe that you were living your life in a true Islamic way, but when real attention was paid to how many good deeds you were doing and what efforts you were making then suddenly you would feel embarrassed and ashamed.

In his address Hazur also spoke about how *all* of his addresses were for *all* Ahmadis.

Hazur-Aqdas said:

"I should also clarify here that you should never think that any of my speeches or instructions are limited to the audience who are sat directly before me... In fact whatever I say, no matter where it is said, is addressed to all Ahmadis in every Jamaat...Every Ahmadi who hears the voice of the Khalifa-Waqt or who comes to read his instructions should consider that he is being directly addressed and instructed."

Many people I spoke to said how the Jalsa had inspired them and had a profound spiritual effect on them. They all said that seeing Hazur and listening to him directly was unlike any other experience they had ever had.

Hearing these words from people raised in the West, who had exposure to all worldly privileges and benefits, was truly amazing. It reinforced to me the true power of Khilafat.

One American Ahmadi, Harris Zafar who was Nazim Press and Media, said about the Jalsa:

“Words cannot being to describe the immense feeling of gratitude and joy I feel after having attended the 2012 Jalsa Salana USA and being in the presence of Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih (aba) for 11 consecutive days.

So much effort and hard work had gone into the planning of Hazur’s (aba) highly anticipated visit, but all the sleepless nights and hours of tense work paled in comparison to the joy of witnessing a successful Jalsa, Masha’Allah.

I had so many personally moving experiences during this year's Jalsa Salana, and most of them involve the blessing of a personal experience with Hazur (aba). Even with over 11,000 people at the Jalsa Gah, Allah Ta'ala so allows one to feel a personal connection with our beloved Khalifa (aba).

I thank Al-Rahman for the blessing of being in the presence of Hazrat Sahib (aba) and for blessing my team with the responsibility to spread awareness of Hazur’s (aba) presence to the entire nation through news media.”

Another Ahmadi, Qasim Rashid said:

“The 2012 USA Jalsa was the culmination of months of planning, thousands of hours of preparation, and countless prayers. I cannot help but view Hazur’s (aba) gracious presence as a once in a lifetime opportunity, for only Allah knows when we will be blessed to be in Hazur’s (aba) company once more.

Having attended USA Jalsa's for some 25 years and seeing growth by leaps and bounds every year, I am moved to tears when I reflect upon Allah's Grace that He has bestowed upon Jamaat USA.

I am confident that in no time, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as) will become a household name, Insha'Allah. The message of Islam is being revived in its pure form, and our fellow Americans are getting a taste of that loving Islam that our beloved Master Muhammad (sa) taught, Alhamdolillah.

All these blessings are due to Hazur's (aba) prayers, and the beautiful event known as the Jalsa Salana. This year's Jalsa was an immense blessing of Allah, and I eagerly await the opportunity again next year, Insha'Allah."

Extended stay in Harrisburg

On the weekend of the Jalsa there had been a power blackout back in Maryland and other nearby areas due to some extreme weather. We soon found out that Baitur Rahman had been affected and the electricity was down and so was the water supply.

We were scheduled to return to Baitur Rahman immediately after the conclusion of the Jalsa but due to the situation in Maryland on Sunday morning there was a sense of confusion in the air. Some people were telling us to pack our belongings as originally planned, whilst others were saying we would definitely be staying in Harrisburg rather than returning to Maryland.

Initially after having been told on Sunday morning that there was no need to pack, suddenly a few minutes before we were due to leave for Jalsa, somebody asked me where my luggage was. When I said I had not packed he told me that I had to pack my luggage and hand it in before we left for Jalsa. Apparently the power had come back on at Baitur Rahman and so we should be ready to go.

I raced back to my room and threw my belongings into my case and within five minutes I had returned fully packed! I looked around to see where other people had left their cases but realised mine was the only one!

Upon returning from the Jalsa, I was still under the impression that we were returning to Maryland after lunch. However soon it was announced that the power had gone out at Baitur Rahman again and so we would remain in Harrisburg for at least one more night.

The Qafila was scheduled to travel onwards to Canada on Tuesday and so in my mind I thought that we would probably end up staying until Tuesday, as Harrisburg was closer to Canada by about two hours than Baitur Rahman and indeed this is how it transpired.

The fact that we were now staying in a hotel for longer than expected did not mean that Hazur's schedule was any lighter.

In fact suddenly the hotel became even more like a temporary Mission House, as hundreds of Ahmadis came over the next couple of days to have Mulaqat with Hazur.

The Jamaat was able to hire a couple of extra conference rooms which were used for Mulaqat, whilst a large board room was hired for Hazur to conduct meetings with the National Amila of the United States Jamaat.

Fajr was offered at the hotel, whilst Hazur travelled to the Hadee Mosque for other prayers. The locals of Harrisburg were truly delighted at the turn of events and many commented how it was Allah's great blessing on them that Hazur's visit to Harrisburg had been extended.

Visit to home of Dr Ahmad Qureshi and Dr Ayesha Ahmad

On Sunday evening, just before Hazur met with dozens of Ahmadis in Mulaqat he visited the home of Dr Ahmad Hameed Qureshi and his wife Dr Ayesha Ahmad. Many of their close and extended family members were also there.

Hazur stayed for around 30 to 40 minutes and you could see the joy on the faces of the hosts.

At one point I said '*Mubarak ho*' to Ayesha baji and she looked at me and tears started forming in her eyes. It was again evident just how strong the bond between Ahmadis and their Khalifa is. It was quite clear to me that those few minutes were something that Dr Ahmad and his family would cherish for the rest of their lives.

Dr Ahmad had an interest in target shooting and so in preparation of Hazur's visit, he had set up a target in his garden. The target was small and pasted to a tree at quite some distance. To the delight of the hosts, Hazur-Aqdas agreed to fire at the target.

Thus using Dr Ahmad's gun, Hazur settled the gun into position with great care.

I remember watching and thinking that the target was so small that it must be impossible to hit. But then Hazur fired the trigger and hit the target directly, Masha'Allah.

Then after the successful first shot, Hazur readied himself to fire at the target again. The second time Hazur took even more care to make sure he had the gun in the correct position. Hazur pulled the trigger and once again he hit the target perfectly, Masha'Allah.

Dr Ayesha Ahmad, who was also the local Jamaat Lajna Sadr, said after Hazur's visit:

“Hazur's visit was amazing. It felt as if members were recharged. We had been preparing for months and all of that was worth it even for a small glimpse of Hazur. Many members and Lajna shared that they personally renewed their attachment to Khilafat during this trip and followed him to Canada since they wanted to enjoy his company longer. His visit to Hadee Mosque Harrisburg was particularly moving to all of us locals.

The fact that he took time from his busy schedule to inaugurate the Mosque and the fact that we got an unexpected bonus of his extended stay in Harrisburg, particularly his departure from that Mosque felt it was divinely planned.

Many members changed their plans and drove from surrounding Jamaats to bid Hazur farewell. Every Lajna I saw that morning had tears in her eyes.

I am now praying for Hazur's health and the Jamaats well-being with far more attention now. I also look at Jamaat work differently now. The way Hazur leads the Jamaat with no moment to spare for self makes me realize that we do a fraction of that so we should not complain.

I also noticed that Hazur's presence affected children and teens profoundly. It's as if they discovered this love for their Khalifa that was lying latent but needed to be activated by his physical proximity.

Hazur's visit to my home was surreal. Every moment feels like a dream that I have replayed in my mind dozens of times. It was a blessing that certainly did not deserve. I will never forget that experience. It was one of the nicest things that has ever happened in my life."

Myra Qureshi, aged 15, and the daughter of Dr Ahmad Qureshi and Dr Ayesha Ahmad said:

"I felt extremely blessed that Hazur decided to come to America this Jalsa, especially since he has not come for four years.

Since in America we don't have the luxury to see Hazur as often as we would like, we all try to get the most out of his brief visits as we possibly can.

I have always loved going to Jalsa, so it was a great honour for it to be held in my hometown of Harrisburg this year.

I also felt very grateful that Hazur took the time out of his busy schedule to visit our home. It was a great blessing for me and my family."

Trip to Bass Pro

On 2nd July 2012, the final full day of Hazur's visit to USA, in the late afternoon, Hazur's elder brother, Dr Mirza Maghfoor Ahmad Sahib, mentioned to Hazur that there was a store nearby which sold hunting equipment. Thus suddenly and without any prior planning, Hazur agreed to visit the store.

It was a huge store filled with huge quantities of outdoor merchandise. The store was also decorated with many stuffed animals on display. Some of the stuffed animals, such as a bear, were really huge and so I spent much of the time in the store trying to determine if the stuffed animals were real or fake and ultimately concluded they were real!

Hazur spent around 30 or 40 minutes in the store looking at the hunting equipment and speaking to one or two of the people who worked there.

It seemed Masha'Allah as though Hazur enjoyed the outing.

As we returned to the hotel, Hazur did not go back to his residence but straight to his office. Immediately Hazur began meeting the Ahmadis in Mulaqat again and this lasted for the next couple of hours until it was time for Maghreb and Isha.

Travel to Canada

The final day of the USA tour was filled with mixed emotions.

From my perspective I was happy to be able to travel onwards with Hazur to Canada for the next part of the tour, but I also saw the sadness in the eyes of the members of the USA Jamaat. Some of them had travelled with Hazur since our arrival in Chicago and the sadness at having to hand over their duties was visibly evident.

We left early morning from the hotel at 8.55am and went straight to the Hadee Mosque where hundreds of Ahmadis had gathered to see off Hazur.

People of all ages had tears streaming down their faces as they contemplated having to part with their Khalifa.

Hazur waved and smiled at them before a final silent prayer was offered before the start of the journey.

As we sat back in the cars I pulled down the window and looked at the Ahmadis who were waving goodbye to Hazur. In their eyes you could see the desperation and hope that Hazur would see them from his car. To a non-Ahmadi such devotion would perhaps seem strange or even unnecessary, but that is because they had never felt the love of Khilafat.

Lunch and Namaz at Applebees

The journey to Canada was quite long and some of the scenery as we drove through the Appalachian mountains was very beautiful.

After a few hours of driving, the Qafila cars pulled off the main highway and headed into a small town and entered a Pizza Hut car park. After thinking we were about to stop for lunch there the cars started moving again and drove about another half mile before stopping at another well-known American restaurant called 'Applebees'. This time the cars parked and we were told that we were stopping for lunch.

In my previous visits to America some relatives had recommended Applebees but I had never had the opportunity to visit and so I was pleased and also somewhat shocked that my first opportunity to eat there would be in the presence of Hazur-Aqdas!

Hazur-Aqdas and his family sat at one side of the restaurant, whilst the rest of us Qafila members sat on another side.

There were a lot of us and obviously giving orders would have taken a long time and so I heard someone say to the waiter that they should bring 'fish' for all of us. As I looked at the menu and saw some delicious dishes, I was a little disappointed as I did not feel like the fried fish that much. At first I was going to keep quiet but then instead I asked the Private Secretary as politely as I could if it would be ok if I chose my own order to which he readily agreed.

After quickly scrolling through the menu I found a rice dish with prawns that looked really appetising and so I ordered that.

After a few minutes everyone's 'fish dish' started to arrive and everyone was eating. I now felt embarrassed that I had made a separate order and it was taking longer and was worried in case I delayed the Qafila due to my desire for my own order!

Just as I was beginning to get really worried, my order finally arrived. I ate extremely fast to make sure I caught up with everyone and despite the haste I really, really enjoyed the food!

And Masha'Allah it became even more enjoyable when we learned that the entire lunch was a gift from Hazur-Aqdas, Masha'Allah.

After lunch it was time for Zuhr and Asr Namaz. There was a patch of grass outside the restaurant where the plan was to do Namaz and indeed we even went and laid out the prayer mats. However just as Hazur-Aqdas was about to come and lead the prayers there was a sudden heavy rainstorm. I was outside only for a few seconds and even in that time I was soaked!

It was clear that it would not be possible to do Namaz outside and so members of the USA Jamaat went and talked to restaurant staff. After a couple minutes of light negotiations they kindly agreed that we could use the front part of the restaurant to offer our prayers and that they would switch off the music CD that was playing in the background.

And so the prayer mats were quickly laid and we assembled in rows before Hazur led the prayers.

It was a very surreal experience, as to the right of us were some diners happily still eating their meals, whilst adjacent our beloved Khalifa was leading the prayers.

I kept thinking that whilst those people did not realise that they were in the presence of Allah's Chosen representative, nevertheless I was sure that they would be positively influenced by the beauty and grace of the Khalifa-tul Masih.

When the Namaz finished, I found myself thinking that even though many bigger events had taken part during the tour, this one of praying behind Hazur in Applebees was actually one of my favourite and certainly one that I would long remember.

Final moments in USA

The next couple of hours were to be the final moments of Hazur's tour to USA and for me personally they were extremely emotional.

Even whilst we were in Applebees I began to feel emotional as I reflected upon how fortunate I had been to travel with Hazur and to see Allah's countless blessings first hand.

Whilst sat at the table I became conscious that a few tears were rolling from my eyes down my face and so I immediately wiped them away hoping nobody had noticed.

When we returned to our respective cars we soon passed a sign for 'Albany' in upstate New York. When I saw this suddenly the tears began to flow again from my eyes and were covered only by my sunglasses.

The reason that the sign for Albany affected me was that before his passing my father used to tell me how when he had just qualified as a doctor in Pakistan he moved to Albany in America for a period of one year for extra training.

When I was young I used to think that Albany was so far away, but in that moment I realised that Alhamdulillah I had been able to travel close to the city where my father worked more than 40 years ago and it was as part of the Qafila of Hazur-Aqdas.

I prayed to Allah that may he pass on to my late parents the news that such a rare and wonderful blessing had been bestowed on their youngest child.

I remember vividly an incident a few days prior to my father's passing. We were sat in a hospital waiting room and the doctor had just given my father some bad news about his health. And so at that time my father said to me that as I was young and he was very ill there would be many moments in my life where he would not be present. He said he would not be there for my marriage or for the birth of my children or for other important landmarks.

He told me to remember just one guiding principle and that was to always stay close to Khilafat. He said that if I followed this then he knew Allah would look after me and I would not suffer in any way.

And so in that moment I thanked Allah from the core of my heart that so far in my life I had been able to stay close to the Khalifa and live under his guidance and love and I prayed that this closeness forever remained and developed, Insha'Allah.

Arrival in Canada

We arrived at around 5pm at the Canada border at Niagara Falls.

Masha'Allah the Canadian Government had arranged for the immigration process to be conducted at a separate checkpoint reserved for visiting dignitaries.

This checkpoint is known as *the 'Whirlpool Bridge to Canada'*. At the border Hazur-Aqdas came out of his car and was greeted by Mr Rick Dykstra MP, Canada's Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Immigration.

And so the tour to USA was complete. And what a tour it had been!

The love of Khilafat was evident at that moment as we looked at the faces of both the American Ahmadis and the Canadian Ahmadis.

Rather than display any tiredness after such a busy tour, all I could see were tears in the eyes of the Americans who were sad that their responsibilities of serving and hosting the Khalifa had come to an end.

As one chapter ended, I saw the faces of the Canadian Ahmadis brimming with excitement and joy as they knew that they were now the hosts of a new chapter of the blessings of the Fifth Khilafat of the Promised Messiah.

May Allah always protect Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya and may the people of the entire world come to realise the blessings attached to the rope of Allah.