

LONDON DIARY

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2018

A Personal Account

Part 1

By Abid Khan

Introduction

On 17 March 2018, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) addressed the *15th Annual Peace Symposium* at the Baitul Futuh Mosque. Huzoor's address was very inspirational and faith inspiring and left a great impact on the vast majority of participants.

However, Huzoor's engagements around the Peace Symposium were certainly not restricted to the formal event. Rather, Huzoor also met many of the guests personally on the day or in subsequent days. Huzoor held two press conferences with media representatives and held meetings with various dignitaries.

Indeed, it was not just that week that was filled with activity, rather the entire month proved extremely blessed and formed another historic chapter in the history of the UK Jamaat.

There is not a single month or week that passes by which is not busy for Khalifatul Masih. Nevertheless, over the course of the month, Huzoor's official engagements and activities were even busier than normal.

During a Mulaqat a few days after the Peace Symposium, Huzoor instructed me to write an account about what I had seen and observed during the days of the Peace Symposium.

Normally, when I write diaries of Huzoor's tours or activities, I keep detailed notes but I had not done that on this occasion. Hence, I was a little apprehensive! Even when I keep detailed notes, I only capture a glimpse into

the life and activities of Huzoor and so I know that my account of the Peace Symposium will be inadequate and cannot do justice to the blessings that transpired.

Thankfully, with Huzoor's prayers, certain incidents and conversations remained clear in my memory and I also did have some handwritten notes which jogged my memory further.

Winning a Purple Heart

In the middle of February, I travelled to the United States for six days with my elder son Mahid. I had been invited to the USA *National Umoor-e-Kharija Conference*, which convened over three cold winter days in Washington DC and Maryland.

As the event coincided with Mahid's half term, I took permission from Huzoor to take Mahid with me on this journey.

Several people were surprised I took Mahid, aged just four, without his mother. I must admit, I even surprised myself, and even after taking permission from Huzoor I wondered if I was doing the right thing or not! However, with Huzoor's prayers, the trip went well and Mahid and I both enjoyed.

A day before returning to London, I spoke with *Amir Sahib USA*, Sahibzada Mirza Maghfoor Ahmad, Huzoor's elder brother, and he even said that I deserved a '*purple heart*' for being able to manage the trip with Mahid!

I did not know what a 'purple heart' was but later learned it was an award given to members of the military who had displayed great bravery and courage!

The best moment of the journey was when we returned back to London safely, knowing that I was once again close to Huzoor and feeling relief that Mahid was home safe and well.

Our flight landed at Heathrow Airport late on 18 February and upon landing, I saw that Huzoor had graciously enquired if we had returned safely.

Upon informing that we had, Huzoor instructed that I report to him after *Asr* the next day.

Preparing his notes

When I reported to Huzoor on the morning of the 19th February, he asked me about my activities in the United States.

Very kindly, Huzoor also expressed interest in how Mahid had been and how if he had been excited to see his mother and brother upon return to London.

Thereafter, Huzoor informed me that on the coming weekend the *National Waqfe-Nau Ijtemas* of both boys and girls were being held and that Huzoor would be addressing both events. Thus, he had called me to take dictation for his two addresses.

Perhaps, I had taken up too much of Huzoor's precious time narrating accounts from my visit to America because after half an hour had passed, Huzoor said:

"Abid, I think you will have to come back tomorrow to take the dictation. In the meantime, I will prepare some notes if I get a chance."

The next day I returned to Huzoor's office in the morning and I had the good fortune to listen and type as Huzoor dictated his two forthcoming addresses over the course of two hours.

First, Huzoor gave dictation for his address to Lajna and Nasirat members of the Waqf-e-Nau.

As I listened to Huzoor's words I was left in awe at the magnificent way in which Huzoor explained women's rights in Islam.

Huzoor spoke of how women were the '*nation builders*' and that rather than being influenced by modern trends that '*come and go*', Ahmadi Muslims should '*heed the everlasting and timeless teachings of the Holy Quran*'.

Huzoor further dictated:

"Ahmadi women should ask themselves that, who are men to bestow rights upon them when their Creator, Allah the Almighty has Himself bestowed upon them all that they need and desire?"

When Huzoor dictates, sometimes I miss points or mishear. Thankfully, Huzoor permits to record the dictation and I listen to it later and add things that I have missed or correct any mistakes.

For instance, at one point, Huzoor took out a copy of the Bible and narrated an incident from it.

Unfortunately, I missed half the words and so listened to the recording later and added the missing words.

During the dictation for the Waqfat-Nau address, Huzoor quoted a story narrated by Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra), the moral of which was that Muslim women did not need to seek their rights by forming groups or through activism because Allah the Almighty had bestowed true equality between men and women.

As Huzoor dictated this part of his address, he said that Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) had mentioned a '*gheeder*' that was needlessly running.

When Huzoor said '*gheeder*' I was confused, as I did not know what this was and so I asked Huzoor its meaning.

In response, Huzoor began to explain the characteristics of the animal.

After a few seconds, I said:

"Huzoor, do you mean a cheetah?"

In response, Huzoor said:

“No not a cheetah! I think the English word for ‘gheeder’ is ‘jackal’.”

Thereafter, Huzoor consulted an *Urdu-English* dictionary before confirming that ‘jackal’ was, in fact, the English word for *gheeder*.

I had heard of jackals but did not know what type of animal they were and so later in the day I went and googled them to learn a bit more!

This incident illustrated my lack of knowledge of animals! It also reminded me of a story, some years ago, when Huzoor narrated a story with an ‘oont’ as the main character and after telling me the entire story, I responded by saying:

“Huzoor, Jazak’Allah that was such an interesting story about a donkey!”

I will never forget that moment because Huzoor suddenly laughed out loud before saying:

“It is not a donkey! Oont is a camel! For the whole story you thought I was talking about a donkey?!”

Upon the conclusion of the dictation of the Waqfat-e-Nau address, I said:

“Huzoor, whilst you were dictating you mentioned an incident narrated by Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) and today is February 20 which is Musleh

Maud Day and so I thought perhaps Huzoor has purposely included this incident.”

Upon this, Huzoor did not say anything and so I concluded that it was a coincidence and the fact Huzoor had quoted Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) was not related to the fact that it was Musleh Maud Day.

Thereafter, Huzoor dictated the address to Waqf-e-Nau boys. The style of Huzoor’s address was slightly different. It had more practical points and instructions for the boys to follow.

At the conclusion, I mentioned this observation to Huzoor and he said that this was his intention and according to the different personalities of boys and girls.

A Whatsapp report

After the dictation concluded, Huzoor asked me about an event the previous evening where a member of *Lajna Imaillah*, Ayesha Malik, had been chosen to defend Islam in a debate at the prestigious *University College London (UCL)* in which the motion being debated was *‘Has Islam failed women?’*.

Having been away for a week, I had no knowledge of the event and so could not present a report.

Upon this, Huzoor told me to send a *Whatsapp* message to *Sadr Lajna UK*, Dr Fariha Khan and ask how the event had been.

Given the urgency, as Huzoor was waiting for the report, I avoided normal pleasantries and sent a message to Sadr Sahiba saying:

“How was Ayesha’s event – please send urgently!”

Thankfully, Sadr Sahiba, who I call Fariha baji, as she is a relative, read the message within a few seconds and responded by saying that the event had gone very well.

In response, Huzoor asked how many people had attended and so I sent a further message and asked her to reply promptly.

In reply, Fariha baji sent a more detailed report, in which she informed that Ayesha was forced to defend Islam on her own, as two other non-Ahmadi ladies had pulled out of the team defending Islam when they found out that an Ahmadi, would be part of their team.

Though last-minute replacements were found they were completely unprepared and so it was left to Ayesha to defend Islam on her own.

Fariha baji sent a comment written by Ayesha herself about the response she received to her presentation. Ayesha wrote:

“After the debate, the speakers from the opposing side were very complimentary of what I had said, and one of the main speakers from the other side, a Professor at Cambridge University, said that if the motion had been ‘Have Ahmadi failed women?’ he would have argued against it and said ‘definitely not!’”

I presented this report to Huzoor and he seemed very pleased to hear the comment.

Of course, Huzoor would never agree with the assertion that Islam had failed women but he appreciated the fact that the Cambridge Professor accepted that the teachings of Ahmadiyyat had upheld the rights of women and not failed them – and of course this was the true example of Islam.

Having just taken dictation of Huzoor’s address on women’s rights, I hoped that once it was published, the *UK Lajna* would send the transcript to those who claimed that Islam had failed women.

Having noticed the urgency in my *Whatsapp* messages, Fariha baji sent another message in which she wrote:

“Abid, you are panicking me! - Are you with Huzoor?”

I was unsure how to respond to this and so I read out her message to Huzoor.

Hearing it, Huzoor, who was checking his mail, laughed and said:

“Tell her yes you are with me and that I am saying that she is sharp and clever!”

Huzoor then continued with his work and after a minute he asked if Fariha baji had replied.

I mentioned that she had responded with a laughter *emoji* followed by another message expressing her love for Khilafat.

It was an extremely enjoyable end to a couple of very blessed hours in the company of beloved Huzoor.

Waqfat-e-Nau and Waqfe-e-Nau National Ijtemas

Alhamdulillah, Huzoor addressed both the *Waqfat-e-Nau* and *Waqf-e-Nau Ijtemas* the following weekend of 24 and 25 February 2018.



Addressing members of Waqfat-e-Nau, Huzoor said:

“Take pride in the fact that your primary duty is to raise the standards of the future generations by setting the very highest standards for them to learn from and follow.”

Huzoor continued:

“By all means, adopt those things that are good in society, but never forget that our true guiding light is, and always will be, the Holy Quran and that our true role model is Holy Prophet of Islam (sa).”

During his address to Waqf-e-Nau boys, Huzoor said:

“In today’s world, many people hold a negative view of Islam and so it is a great challenge for all of you to counter the false impression that has developed. It is your duty, even more than others, to show the world that Islam is a religion of peace, love and compassion.”

Love for Khilafat

Following the *Ijtemas*, some members of the Waqf-e-Nau scheme told me about the effect Huzoor’s address and his constant guidance had played in their lives.

Naima Clarke, the wife of a young Jamaat Missionary, said:

“I am the youngest of three siblings and my mother had suffered a lot during the pregnancies of my elder brother and sister and so decided to stop having children after my sister’s birth. However, when she heard the sermon of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (ra) on 3 April 1987 (in which he announced the establishment of the Waqf-e-Nau scheme) she greatly desired to have another child who would be part of the blessed scheme, despite knowing her potential for illness during pregnancy.”

Naima sahiba continued:

“Having heard this story from my parents, it means even more to me to be a Waqf-e-Nau because I know that my existence is purely due to this scheme and hence it is my life and who I am.”

Speaking of Huzoor’s personal guidance to her, Naima sahiba said:

“I am very blessed as Huzoor has advised me not only as a member of the Waqf-e-Nau scheme but also as the wife of a Missionary and one such incident will forever stay in my mind.”

Naima sahiba continued:

“After my husband’s first official Jamaat posting as a Missionary, we had a Mulaqat with Huzoor, and Huzoor’s words of advice were ‘apna ghar ka mahaul aman aur muhabbat wala bano’ – meaning, ‘Make the environment of your home one of peace and love’. Those words resonated with us so much that we had Huzoor’s words printed in a quote and have them hung up on the wall in our home.”

Another member of Waqfat-e-Nau, Hamooda Arif said:

“Huzoor’s address at the Waqfat-e-Nau Ijtema was a reminder to not fall target to the glamour of the modern world. It was a reminder that no man can give women rights because Allah the Almighty has given women their rights already. Huzoor wants us to be confident and strong women, not just role models for our Jamaat but for the whole society.”

Hamooda sahiba continued:

“Huzoor is the perfect father in this world. I feel at peace when I see him. Every time I listen to any of his words, I find myself making promises to better myself in the ways that Huzoor has said. For example, one thing I have embraced from Huzoor’s words is Purdah. I initially found it hard to wear a scarf in secondary school but listening to Huzoor enabled me to embrace it. So much so, that I was left humbled when Huzoor once commented that I always observe good Purdah.”

Reflecting on Huzoor’s address, *Sabiha Khullat Chima*, a young member of the Waqf-e-Nau scheme said:

“On this earth today, mankind cannot witness a human more inspiring than Huzoor. He is the guardian of Islamic principles on earth and demonstrates the true teachings of Islam through his very own character. Huzoor is the forefront advocate for women’s rights and his words help me understand the value of women in Islam. Huzoor’s address helped me understand that there is no purpose in following the superficial glamour and constantly changing trends of this world.”

Another Waqfat-e-Nau, *Ghazala Abbasi* explained how Huzoor had guided her throughout her life. She said:

“It makes me feel very special and humbled that Huzoor gives us so much of his precious time. It also makes me want to do better and better. I am very mesmerised by the fact that Huzoor talks to a normal person like me

in the same way that he talks to a renowned politician. Only a Khalifa could do that!"

Another member of the Waqf-e-Nau scheme, *Maheda Rehman*, told me how she had been surprised that Huzoor had spoken so openly about the ongoing scandal of sexual abuse of women in the Western world.

Maheda Rehman said:

"The part of Huzoor's address that struck to me the most was how Huzoor spoke about current affairs and did not hesitate to mention the current scandals and campaign taking place in Hollywood and other parts of the world based on women harassment i.e the MeToo campaign. Although, a very sensitive and somewhat awkward topic to speak of, Huzoor addressed the matter and pin pointed the cause of such issues in society stemming from straying away from moral teachings and explained the wisdom underpinning Islamic concepts such as segregation."

Meeting with new converts from France

The *Ijtemas* were certainly not the only events to take place that weekend. Rather, Huzoor's normal schedule of *daftari* (official) Mulaqats, family Mulaqat's and other meetings continued.

Over the past few years, it has also become a common practice for delegations of Ahmadis to travel together to meet Huzoor in London. Whilst

Huzoor is in London, it seems that almost every weekend there is a group or delegation who comes to meet him from abroad.

For example, on Saturday, 24 February, Huzoor met with a delegation of 92 Ahmadis from France, most of whom were recent converts to Ahmadiyyat. The majority were of Moroccan or Algerian origin.

An Ahmadi convert sought Huzoor's prayers because some of his family members were becoming distant from the Jamaat after being influenced by a non-Ahmadi.

In response, Huzoor said:

"You should not break contact with the family members. Rather, you should politely and lovingly, try to make your family members understand the true teachings of Ahmadiyyat, and explain to them the truth of the claims of the Promised Messiah (as). Explain to them that what the non-Ahmadi is teaching is wrong but remember there is no need to be harsh or to become angry."

An Ahmadi lady was extremely emotional and Huzoor himself noticed this and so when she was handed the microphone, Huzoor told her that she did not have to speak if it was difficult.

However, the lady was determined to express her love for Khilafat and so with her voice quivering with great emotion she thanked Huzoor for his love and kindness.

During the meeting, one lady informed Huzoor that she was the Lajna *General Secretary* in her local Jamaat, as well as holding several other offices including *Lajna Secretary Maal*.

Upon this, Huzoor jokingly remarked:

“Why did you leave the other few departments in the Amila? You should have taken them all!”

Knowing the word count!

On 3 March 2018, Huzoor attended the *Humanity First International Conference* taking place that weekend at Baitul Futuh.

During the conference, delegates from different countries came together to discuss the various projects of Humanity First and shared their experiences.

A few days earlier, Huzoor called me to his office and dictated his address for the event.

As I sat down, Huzoor said that his address would be for just a few minutes but as Huzoor started to dictate, words flowed from his blessed tongue and it was soon clear that the address would be longer.

Thus, upon concluding the dictation, Huzoor smiled and said:

“I think that rather than five minutes this will be at least twenty-five minutes! I think the word count will be just over 2,000 words!”

Huzoor's estimate proved very accurate, as once the transcript was final and printed, it came to 2,077 words!

Huzoor further said:

“Humanity First are providing water and other humanitarian services and I have mentioned this as well but the main objective is to remind them that serving humanity has a direct link with spirituality.”

Huzoor's address at Humanity First Conference

Huzoor's address proved extremely emotional and a reminder of how the work of Humanity First was inspired above all by the teachings of Islam.



Huzoor said:

“Irrespective of the cause of the suffering, if we claim to be true Muslims, it is our obligation and paramount duty to assist all people who are facing difficulties and to strive to alleviate their pain and distress.”

Huzoor continued:

“No matter where in the world, or which communities they hail from, Humanity First should seek to provide relief to those mired in poverty or hardship. This is your mission. This is your duty. This is your faith.”



During his address, Huzoor also referred to a video played earlier, which had shown the work of *Humanity First Pakistan*.

Huzoor noted that during the video, instrumental music was played in the background. Very clearly, Huzoor said that this was wrong.

Huzoor said:

“When we prepare such films or documentaries they should be without music. The reason I am highlighting this is so that the other Jamaat organisations or Humanity First established in other countries should not follow this example. It is not permissible. It would have been better if they had included a poem.”

It was another example of how at every possible juncture, Khalifa-Waqt guards and protects the Jamaat from any innovation in faith or anything that could lead to Ahmadi Muslims moving away from their faith.

To some people, a little background music may seem like a small or negligible issue but if we innovate or adapt our faith over one issue, what is to stop us changing another and then another?

We are truly fortunate that Huzoor guides and keeps the Jamaat united under the umbrella of the true teachings of Islam. Huzoor constantly reminds us that we must follow our faith, rather than be dictated by what modern day society deems appropriate.

Impact of Huzoor's words

After the event, I spoke with some of the senior members of Humanity First and delegates who attended the event.

Dr Aziz Hafiz, *Director International Disaster Relief Humanity First International*, said:

“Huzoor’s address had an amazing impact. It made it clear that it is only due to Allah’s Favours that we are able to serve in Humanity First and not due to our own abilities. Huzoor made this point very clearly when he said that the success of Humanity First was not linked to any Chairman or Director. Huzoor’s words remind us that our abilities can only take us a few steps but through Allah’s Grace we can achieve unbelievable results.”

Naseer Dean, *Vice Chairman Humanity First International* said:

“Huzoor’s address was inspirational and spiritually uplifting. The address brought home to me in the most beautiful way the responsibility that I have, as an Ahmadi Muslim and being a follower of Hazrat Masih Maud (as), of fulfilling my religious obligation in serving humanity, particularly those in need and hardship.”

Naseer Dean sahib continued:

“Above all, what affected me the most and had the strongest impact was to be reminded that only with Allah’s Grace and Mercy we are enabled to serve and be successful, and only by remaining loyal obedient members of the Jamaat can our works be blessed.”

Dr Aslam Daud, *Chairman Humanity First Canada*, said:

“Huzoor’s presence by itself was very motivating for all of us. We all felt very encouraged and honoured and were super charged. His whole speech was a means of rejuvenation for us. His very strong words about serving others that ‘This is your mission, this is your duty, this is your faith’ left a lasting impact and continues to resonate in our hearts.”

From the United States, Dr Ahsan Khan, representing the *Gift of Sight* project, said:

“In the past, I too have asked people to prepare Gift of Sight videos with light music in background and now I know to refrain from this and

instead use Nazms. I know our USA Humanity First team was silently breathing a huge sigh of relief because the US video played at the event featured a Nazm and not music!"

When I spoke with Munum Naeem, *Executive Director Humanity First USA*, he also mentioned the fact that Huzoor had clarified that music should not be used in promo videos.

Munum sahib said:

"In terms of the restriction on music, we will of course absolutely follow Huzoor's guidance. First of all, the music is a distraction. Furthermore, Huzoor's instruction was very profound and, in my view, there is great wisdom underpinning this restriction. It reminds us that Humanity First is a part of the Jamaat and not something separate."

Munum sahib continued:

"Indeed, Huzoor-Anwar mentioned that Humanity First exists to fulfil the reasoning of the coming of the Promised Messiah (as) and so it is incumbent upon us to follow the traditions and practices of the Jamaat in all respects."

Meeting with USA Lajna and Nasirat delegation

On 4 March 2018, Huzoor met with a group of around 100 young Lajna and Nasirat members, some of whom had never met him before, who had travelled from the United States.

Most kindly, a couple of days later, Huzoor played the DVD recording of the meeting in his office during my Mulaqat with him.

Many of the ladies and girls asked Huzoor questions about contemporary or theological issues and with great love and patience, Huzoor answered each of their questions.

As I listened, Huzoor continued with his office work but would look up from time to time and comment. It was clear that Huzoor had enjoyed the meeting and appreciated the efforts of the Lajna of travelling to meet him.

An Ahmadi girl asked why Ahmadi women rarely spoke at Jamaat events in front of men and whether such restrictions were part of Islam or just a manifestation of '*Pakistani culture*'.

In response, Huzoor said:

“It is not a cultural issue but rather the commandment of Purdah is given in the Holy Quran and was practiced during the time of the Holy Prophet (sa).”

Huzoor continued:

“It is narrated in many Ahadith that Hazrat Ayesha (ra) used to give lectures to the Muslim men but from behind a curtain. Though the Holy Prophet (sa) said that half of the Islamic faith could be learned from Ayesha (ra), still, she did not come in front of men but maintained Purdah. This was the case of the woman who, as the wife of the Holy

Prophet (sa), was deemed as the ‘Ummul Momineen’, the ‘mother of the believers’.

After I had listened to the answer, Huzoor looked up from his work and said:

“At that moment, Allah the Almighty put it in my heart to give the example of Hazrat Ayesha (ra) and of how she was Ummul Momineen yet still she observed the highest standards of Purdah at all times. This is a point that should be made when answering this type of question.”

A fifteen-year old girl mentioned that schools in America were due to take part in a ‘seventeen-minute walk-out’ in order to remember the victims of the Florida school shooting a few weeks earlier. She asked Huzoor if Ahmadi students were permitted to partake.

In response, Huzoor said they could participate so long as the walkout was peaceful and done with the intention of paying tribute to those who had lost their lives.

However, Huzoor said that that the Ahmadi students should not raise any slogans against the Government or leaders of the nation.

Huzoor said:

“It is good to pay tribute to those who were killed senselessly and in fact, it would not be wrong to say that they were martyred. Thus, by taking part in such peaceful events you are showing your sentiments of love and

sympathy for your fellow countrymen and manifest your love for your nation.”

A girl asked Huzoor about the Jamaat’s relationship with the Israeli authorities.

In his answer, Huzoor explained that the Holy Prophet (sa) made covenants with the Jews and that the early Muslims had good relations with the Jewish people until the latter violated those agreements. Thus, there was nothing in Islam that prevented Muslims from having good relations with Jews or the people of any other faiths.

Huzoor said:

“Our Ahmadis in Kababir are living peacefully and are respected by the government and authorities. In fact, they openly say that Ahmadis are true Muslims. So why should we break our relations with them?”

Huzoor continued:

“Nonetheless, it is completely wrong to suggest that we are conspiring against Islam! Rather, we believe that we should have positive relations with the people of all faiths and all beliefs. Indeed, it is only through dialogue and understanding that we can spread the message of Islam and it was through such dialogue that Jewish people accepted Islam in the time of the Holy Prophet of Islam (sa).”

An Ahmadi girl said she had felt a degree of racism existed even amongst Ahmadis and asked how this could be stopped.

Upon this, Huzoor did not say that she was wrong. Rather, he condemned any forms of racism, whether intentional or not.

Huzoor said:

“One example, I have seen is that Pakistani Ahmadis often start talking in Urdu if an African Ahmadi or a white Ahmadi or from another nation enters the room. Sometimes, they switch to Urdu, even though previously they were speaking in English. This is completely wrong and such habits can be considered racist.”

Huzoor continued:

“There should not be any racism within our Jamaat, rather we should mix with the people of all ethnicities and for this reason, I am in favour of marriages of Ahmadis in which the husband and wife are from different ethnic backgrounds, as I believe this is a way to remove lingering prejudices. There are some Pakistani Ahmadis who have married Ahmadis from Western countries or have married African-American Ahmadis and this is positive. Certainly, wherever there is a hint of racism, prejudice or discrimination it should be stopped.”

Another lady asked about recent developments in fertility treatment and childbirth. She asked if Islam permitted the use of a third-party surrogate to

take on physical pregnancy on behalf of a married couple for medical reasons.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“It is not permissible to use a third-party for a pregnancy. Islam is very clear that to have a child it should be the husband’s sperm, the wife’s egg and the wife’s own womb. If a woman is unable to carry a child it is better for her to adopt.”

As the meeting came to an end, a Lajna member asked Huzoor when he would next come to the United States.

In response, Huzoor said:

“You should pray that I am able to come soon.”

A lesson in Purdah

At the end of the meeting, *Sadr Lajna USA*, Saliha Malik sahiba, requested a photo of the group with Huzoor.

In response, Huzoor said:

“I will take individually with each family.”

Upon this, Sadr Sahiba said that they would be happy with a group photo as it would save Huzoor’s time.

However again, Huzoor said:

“It is better to take them individually, by family.”

Huzoor further said:

“If I say photos should be with family it means I am actually giving you a message – to respect your Purdah.”

After listening to this comment in Huzoor’s office, I said:

“I think Huzoor’s point is that if the photos were taken in a group then each Lajna member would show her family and display the photo in her home, even though it would include the women from other families. In this way, people could have photos of Ahmadis ladies who were not their family members or relatives on display in their home.”

Huzoor said:

“Yes, this was the reason.”

This incident illustrates how at all times, Huzoor is ever conscious of safeguarding the teachings of Islam.

Rather than risk a weakening in Purdah standards, Huzoor was ready to sacrifice his own time and take part in individual photos.

By sacrificing his own time, Huzoor was setting an example for the Lajna, by giving them a message that at all times they should observe the highest standards of Hijab.

Reflections of American Lajna

After watching the recording of the meeting, I spoke to some of the Lajna members who were fortunate enough to meet Huzoor that day.

The *Sadr Lajna USA*, *Saliha Malik sahiba*, who told me that the trip to London had proven a “*life-changing*” experience for some of the girls, some of whom were previously not closely connected to the Jamaat. Having met Huzoor their priorities had changed and they were more inclined towards their faith.

One of the young Lajna members who met Huzoor was *Nazeeha Ghazala Latif*, an African-American Ahmadi from New Jersey. She told me her sole motivation for travelling to London was to “***finally see Huzoor with my very own eyes***”.

Speaking about when she met Huzoor in the group Mulaqat, Ghazala sahiba said:

“When Huzoor walked into the room, I was so taken aback by the fact that he was glowing. Huzoor was very open and very friendly, he even made some jokes and the meeting was held in a light mood. In this way, Huzoor was very different to how I had imagined him to be because on TV he appears more serious.”

Ghazala sahiba continued:

“The highlight of the trip was when Huzoor walked from the Fazl Mosque to his residence after Salat. At that time, most of us young Lajna lined up outside the Mosque to see him. As I am taller than most of the girls I was able to see Huzoor much better and when Huzoor looked over towards the Lajna he smiled at me. It was such an amazing feeling that the Khalifa-Waqt noticed me out of fifty or more people.”

Summing up her feelings about the benefits of the journey, Ghazala sahiba said:

“This trip has motivated me to be a better person in many ways. I can’t say that I have always been the most strict when it comes to offering prayers on time and reading the Quran every day, however, after this trip, I feel more obligated to do those things. For I had the chance to meet Huzoor and I would love to have that chance again and the only way for me to get that opportunity is to improve and be a better version of myself.”

Areeba Noor Ahmad (16) from Upstate New York said:

“The meeting with Huzoor was breath-taking. It felt as if it was a dream. As soon as Huzoor walked into the room, the room filled with joy and love and I felt like crying. I felt emotional and I couldn’t believe it. Later, as I raised my hand to ask a question Huzoor looked right at me and chose me. My beloved Huzoor answered the question with a response I will never forget. Huzoor’s personality is very beautiful. No words could

describe how beautiful the experience was. Every day I pray to Allah and thank him for giving me an experience like that. I will never forget it.”

Munazza Alam from Boston said:

“When Huzoor walked into the room and said salaam to us, I felt like a bright light was irradiating from his presence and I was surprised to feel tears rolling down my cheeks. I was nervous but excited.”

Masoom Murdad (16) from Chicago said:

“This trip has definitely brought me closer to my faith. Being able to see such a holy and spiritual man in person was a life-changing experience.”

Foundation Stone Ceremony at Baitul Futuh

The following day, 4 March 2018, the snowstorm and freezing weather that had hit the UK in previous days, the so-called ‘*Beast from the East*’, had begun to subside but it remained bitterly cold.

In the late afternoon, Huzoor came to the Baitul Futuh Mosque and laid the foundation stone for the reconstruction of the administrative complex at the Mosque which had been destroyed by a fire in September 2015.

After laying the foundation stone, Huzoor placed the ring of the Promised Messiah (as) that he wears directly on the stone for a few seconds and prayed.

Subsequently, additional stones were laid by Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor's respected wife*) and senior office bearers of the Jamaat.



At the end, Huzoor himself called Dr Muhammad Masud-ul-Hasan Nuri, (*Executive Director, Tahir Heart Institute*) to lay a stone as a representative of the Pakistan Jamaat and Huzoor also personally bestowed the same honour on Munir Odeh (*Director Production, MTA International*), a representative of both MTA and of the Arab people.

I later asked a member of the UK Jamaat what happens to the large slab in which the foundation stone is set. I was told that it is kept safe until the builders start actively digging up the foundations and then it is laid down securely.

As I watched the ceremony and observed the architectural plans for the rebuilt complex, I could not help but remember how when the fire took place, the members of the Jamaat were panicked and devastated.

At that time, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) gave us the strength to continue and said that the divinely guided Jamaats only looked to the future and never to the past. Huzoor said that, with the Help of Allah, the administrative block would be rebuilt and would, *Insha'Allah*, be even better than before the fire.

Huzoor's continued guidance to UK Jamaat

One of the people closely involved with the planning of the various events that took place during the month, including the Baitul Futuh inauguration, was Nasser Khan sahib, *Naib Amir UK*.

Nasser sahib has served the UK Jamaat for many years, under the guidance of both Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) and Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba). Apart from his duties as *Naib Amir*, Nasser Khan sahib has also been the *Officer Jalsa Salana UK* for several years.

One afternoon, I sat with Nasser sahib in his office at Baitul Futuh and listened as he explained how Huzoor guided the UK Jamaat and was the source of inspiration for its various projects.

Regarding the Baitul Futuh inauguration, Nasser sahib told me that the UK Jamaat had hired a world-famous architect to redesign the administrative block following the fire.

Throughout the process, Nasser sahib or Amir Sahib UK would show Huzoor the plans and seek his guidance.

Recounting how Huzoor had himself changed the initial drawings prepared by the architect, Nasser sahib said:

“When we showed Huzoor the original plan made by the world-renowned architect, Huzoor immediately noted that the designs did not take into account that the administrative complex was part of a Mosque. Thus, Huzoor said that the administrative block should also have Islamic characteristics. Huzoor said that it should include a dome and himself Huzoor took hold of the drawings and drew two minarets with his own hands to be included.”

Nasser sahib continued:

“With Huzoor’s guidance the look of the entire complex was transformed, otherwise it would have looked like any other modern building, yet now Insha’Allah it will look extremely distinguished. It was Huzoor’s inspiration entirely!”

Nasser sahib explained that it had taken a long time to get the necessary planning approval from the local council because Morden council considers Baitul Futuh as a ‘landmark’ site and so they wished to be involved in the process of the redesign.

In fact, the council, established its own expert design panel of architects to give recommendations on the Baitul Futuh project and Nasser sahib was called to present the architectural drawings that the Jamaat proposed before the expert panel. These were the drawings that were based on Huzoor’s guidance.

As he told me what the expert panel concluded, Nasser sahib began to laugh. He said:

“When I showed them our plans they responded by saying ‘This is actually the best possible plan and we can not improve it any anyway!’”

More generally, I asked Nasser sahib what it was like to serve Khilafat and to be one of the people involved with organising events attended by Khalifatul Masih or projects that are directly under his guidance.

Nasser sahib said:

“Huzoor is extremely forgiving but he also expects people to work hard and so there is a balance. We are very grateful that sometimes Huzoor turns a blind eye to some of our shortcomings but, where he deems necessary, Huzoor points out our mistakes and this serves to guide us and to help us elevate our own standards.”

Nasser sahib continued:

“Certainly, during his period of Khilafat, our standards have improved immeasurably and Huzoor does not let us become complacent. In other spheres, after 15 years you might think that you know everything but Huzoor never lets us slip or think in this way, rather he keeps motivating us to improve and get better.”

Nasser sahib further said:

“Huzoor has got such a sharp eye and picks up on everything and every detail. He is fully aware of our characters. He knows us and our flaws and weaknesses but Huzoor will not explicitly point out the fact that he understands us completely. It is a means of even greater fear that Huzoor observes us and knows us inside out and what we are.”

As our conversation ended, Nasser Khan sahib reflected upon Huzoor’s personality.

Nasser Khan sahib said:

“What never ceases to amaze me is how connected to God Almighty Huzoor is at all times. At every moment, we are watching and observing Huzoor. We watch how Huzoor walks, how he sits, how he talks, the way he is, his every movement and yet there is a never a time when he slips up. His conduct remains entirely composed and according to the teachings of Islam at every second and in every situation. I find it truly astonishing.”

Nasser Khan sahib continued:

“This alone is enough to prove to me that there is a Supreme Being and a Supreme Hand supporting the Khalifa-Waqt at all times. Otherwise, no normal human being, no matter how clever, no matter how trained or prepared, would be able to survive the scrutiny that Huzoor is subjected to. For example, when Huzoor meets media, the journalists often try to

push Huzoor into a corner or to say something that perhaps he would regret but it never happens! It never happens! To me this is the distinguishing factor of Khilafat and is proof that Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyyat is Divinely guided.”

I had very much enjoyed my time with Nasser sahib and I felt emotional listening to him describe the extreme pressure and sheer weight of responsibility that Huzoor has no choice but to absorb every day.

I too can say that I have seen Huzoor in hundreds, if not thousands of situations, whether meeting world leaders, media, Ahmadis and in my personal Mulaqats and have never once seen Huzoor lose his composure, never once seen him say or do anything that could be considered anything other than dignified, honourable, sincere and truthful.

With Khilafat, seeing is believing, the more you see Huzoor, the more you understand your faith and the more you believe in the claim of the Promised Messiah (as).

“Pesh hona”

By the time the Baitul Futuh inauguration had concluded and Huzoor was ready to depart it was almost 6pm.

During those days, my Mulaqat with Huzoor normally took place around 4.30pm and so, as Huzoor was leaving, I approached him and asked if I should still report for Mulaqat at the Fazl Mosque.

Over the years, Huzoor has regularly tried to improve my Urdu and has encouraged me with great patience and on many occasions, Huzoor has corrected my grammar or pronunciations.

Yet, despite this, my spoken Urdu remains very much a work-in-progress. Sometimes, I end up using words in the wrong context and so was my fate on that afternoon!

After approaching Huzoor, I said:

“Huzoor, aaj mein pesh ayun Mulaqat ke liye?”

The word ‘*pesh*’ means to present or submit one’s self but the context I used was not quite right and a bit over the top!

I think a more appropriate word would have been ‘*hazir*’, which means ‘*present*’ or I could have simply asked ‘*Aaj ayun?*’, that ‘*Should I come today?*’

Anyway, upon hearing my mixed-up grammar and use of the word ‘*pesh*’, Huzoor laughed and said:

“Aaj tum biwi aur bachon ke saamnay pesh ho!”

Meaning:

“Today, just present yourself to your wife and children!”

Hearing Huzoor's joke, I laughed but I also felt embarrassed at my error. I was also worried that Huzoor may have thought I was *seeking* permission to be excused from Mulaqat.

Thus, at the next opportunity, I apologised to Huzoor and said my intention in asking was only because I did not wish for Huzoor's precious time to be wasted.

Huzoor's response was very kind and sympathetic. Huzoor said:

“There is no need for you to say sorry. Even experts in Urdu speaking make mistakes sometimes.”

Huzoor's comment put my mind at ease and made me feel a lot better!

Meeting with Swedish academics

During Huzoor's tour of Sweden in 2016, Huzoor held a meeting with several Swedish academics.

One of the academics was Jonas Otterbeck, *Professor of Islamic Studies at Lund University* and on 6 March 2018, Professor Otterbeck came to London to meet Huzoor for a second time and brought more than a dozen of his students with him.

Their purpose was to seek Huzoor's guidance about the true teachings of Islam and to further their own understanding of the religion.

During a 40-minute meeting, they were able to ask Huzoor various questions about religion and faith.



One of the students asked Huzoor if Ahmadis were able to perform Hajj.

“Ahmadi Muslims do go for Hajj wherever the circumstances permit as we believe Hajj to be one of the pillars of Islam. As a result of my position as Khalifatul Masih, if I were to go for Hajj perhaps there would be some problems created by the Government or the fanatical Mullahs but other Ahmadis do go and perform it.”

Huzoor continued:

“Even my own elder brother and my uncles have performed Hajj. As I have not been able to go, I asked someone to do Hajj on my behalf, which meant that I paid for all their travel expenses. This is something that can also be done by those who are unable to personally go for Hajj.”

Another student asked Huzoor if he would recount any incident from his childhood that had impacted upon his own faith.

In response, Huzoor narrated a very beautiful incident that illustrated the pious way in which he was raised and how, even as a child, Huzoor remained firm to the truth.

Huzoor said:

“When I was around seven years old, I remember that on one occasion I had not offered my prayer (Salat). My mother came and asked me if I had offered prayer and so I told her I had not. Upon this, she told me that I should immediately go and offer my prayers. She reminded me of the importance of bowing down before Allah the Almighty.”

Huzoor continued:

“Certainly, that one incident had a strong and lifelong impact upon me, as it made me realise, even at that young age, that no matter what, we must always discharge our duties to our Creator. The way my mother firmly reminded me, ensured that the importance of offering prayers remained ingrained in my heart forever and also that we must always tell the truth.”

‘Pathos’ and a dictionary

Following the meeting, Professor Otterbeck told me how he and his students had appreciated the opportunity to meet Huzoor and benefited.

Professor Otterbeck said:

“To be able to meet His Holiness (Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad) was a great honour for us. No one can, of course, better represent the Ahmadiyya faith than he. His Holiness was extremely generous and I personally was very excited to be able to pose some questions directly to him.”

Professor Otterbeck continued:

“Similarly, the students found the meeting very exciting for several reasons. First, they had never met a religious authority possessing the dignity of His Holiness. Secondly, they all found the meeting less formal than expected and extremely comfortable.”

Professor Otterbeck further said:

“Several things he said struck a chord with us and we felt deeply sympathetic for him as he explained the impossibility for him to perform the Hajj due to the religious-political circumstances that exist.”

Professor Otterbeck then made a comment that I did not fully understand. He said:

“Also, the pathos and ethos as a believer manifest by His Holiness made a deep impression when he spoke about his childhood or humbly mentioned how he had been elected as Khalifatul Masih.”

My confusion lay in the fact that I was unsure what he meant by ‘pathos’.

Later in the day, when I had the chance, I mentioned Professor Otterbeck’s comment to Huzoor and upon this, Huzoor smiled and put down the file of office mail that he had been reading. Huzoor picked up a small electric dictionary that he keeps on his desk and typed in the word ‘*pathos*’.

Thereafter, Huzoor looked up and said:

“Pathos means the quality or power in an actual life experience or other forms of expression, of evoking a feeling of pity or of a sympathetic and kindly sorrow or compassion.”

I have to admit, I was still a little unsure of exactly what Professor Otterbeck meant but it appeared Huzoor understood and had appreciated his comment!

Anyway, I was grateful to have this extra moment with Huzoor where I saw Huzoor smile and consult his dictionary.

Inauguration of Baitul Ehsan Mosque

On 10 March 2018, Huzoor inaugurated the Baitul Ehsan Mosque in Mitcham, a district in south-west London, a few miles from Baitul Futuh.

The Mosque was situated in an industrial estate and was just a few hundred metres from another building that had been inaugurated by Huzoor in early 2017.

The previous building had been purchased by the UK Jamaat for £600,000 but a few months later, the Jamaat became aware of a far bigger six-storey building on the same industrial complex that had gone on sale. With Huzoor's approval, the UK Jamaat purchased the new site for £1.5million.



Apart from the Mosque, the building will serve as an administrative headquarters for the UK Jamaat.

Upon arrival, Huzoor unveiled a plaque to commemorate the inauguration before leading a silent prayer. Thereafter, Huzoor led the Asr prayer at the Mosque.

After Namaz, to the delight of the local Ahmadis, Huzoor turned around from his position in the *Mehrab* and spent some time informally with the local Jamaat.

After inquiring about the attendance figures at Namaz, Huzoor said:

“There are a lot of Ahmadis who live nearby and so this Mosque should always be filled with worshippers.”



Upon this, a local Ahmadi responded by saying:

“Huzoor, if you keep coming then the attendance will be very high!”

In response, Huzoor smiled and said:

“First ensure that the Mosque is always full and then if you hold some events and invite me, Insha’Allah I will come.”

Later, Huzoor was given a tour of the Baitul Ehsan complex and he also met members of *Lajna Imaillah* and distributed chocolates to the local Ahmadi children.

A miracle of Huzoor's prayers

One person, who was the recipient of Huzoor's love that day was a young Missionary, *Tahir Khalid (26)*, who had been posted in Mitcham since his graduation from Jamia Ahmadiyya UK in 2015.

Telling me about his memories of the day, Tahir said:

“As Huzoor was getting ready to depart after the inauguration, I took the opportunity to say to Huzoor that it was my hope that this area would become the UK Jamaat's equivalent to Peace Village in Canada, where almost the entire population is of Ahmadis. When I said this, Huzoor responded by saying ‘This is more of an industrial area, rather than a residential one’.”

Tahir continued:

“Anyway, thereafter, Huzoor took hold of my hand in an extremely loving way and those few seconds were extremely emotional for me. It was incredible how in the midst of such a busy programme, Huzoor still found the time to show such love.”

Reflecting on the impact of Huzoor's visit, a few weeks later, Tahir said:

“When Huzoor came to Baitul Ehsan he particularly asked about the attendance at Fajr and Isha prayers. At the time, around 10 people would come for Fajr and between 30 and 40 would attend Isha. However, since that day we are regularly seeing 55 people attend the Fajr prayer and

the average for Isha is now 80 people. Of course, now it is our challenge to maintain and further improve upon our standards of worship so that we fulfil the desires of Khalifatul Masih.”



Tahir also told me of another comment Huzoor made to him at the Baitul Ehsan inauguration.

Huzoor said:

“When I went to the Lajna side, I saw your son and he is completely fine.”

Huzoor was referring to *Ashar Ahmad*, the first child of Tahir and his wife *Amatul Mateen Khalid*. With the *Grace of Allah*, he was fine but only due to a miracle achieved through the prayers of Khilafat.

Ashar had been born a few weeks earlier on 18 December 2017. However, his birth and first few days on earth had been extremely precarious.

Narrating what unfolded, Tahir said:

“One day, around the time of the due date, I had left home to lead the Zuhr prayers when I received a call from her to come back urgently as she was bleeding quite heavily. We rushed to the hospital and the baby’s heartbeat dropped drastically and then seemed to stop completely. As a result, the doctors said that they had to take the baby out immediately through an emergency caesarean.”

Tahir continued:

“I was not allowed in during the surgery but before I left the room, I said to my wife that ‘We believe in Allah the Almighty and whatever Allah does is for our benefit and so we must remain positive even during this period of trial.”

When the baby was delivered he was in a critical state and the team of doctors had to perform CPR on him for 20 minutes.

Thereafter, they told Tahir that the baby was at severe risk of permanent brain damage and was also suffering from severe kidney damage, lung damage and liver damage. He was not responding in any way, his blood pressure was critically high and his acid levels were far beyond what is considered critical.

The doctors said he had to be transferred to another hospital where they could offer better specialist care but even that transfer was delayed because the child had a fit.

As Tahir recounted this harrowing experience, I remembered myself many of the details because, at the time, Tahir called me a few times and asked if I could convey the details to Huzoor and seek his prayers.

In one such call, Tahir told me the doctors had said that he and his wife may have to consider whether they wish to keep the life support machine on.

It was late night, well after midnight, when he called me and so I said to him:

“Whatever you do, do not make any decision before you are able to seek the guidance of Huzoor.”

Explaining further, Tahir said:

“As they finally got Ashar ready to transfer him to St. George’s hospital the doctors told me and my wife to come and see him because they could not guarantee his survival on the journey. He was still not responding at all and so at that exact moment, I prayed to Allah with all my heart. I then went to see him and loudly said ‘Assalamo Alaikum’ and as I did so, Ashar’s arm and leg moved up instantly. Seeing this, my heart became fully satisfied that Huzoor’s prayers are with us and Allah has heard them.”

Alhamdulillah, over the next 24 hours and the days that followed Ashar made miraculous progress.

Throughout this period, Tahir would go to offer *Namaz* at the Fazl Mosque and meet Huzoor after the prayers concluded.

On each occasion, with great love, Huzoor would ask about the child, prescribe homoeopathy and pray for his recovery.

Even though the doctors had said that the child would more than likely have severe brain damage, now just a few months later, he appears well and is fully engaged and active.

Reflecting on the blessings of Khilafat, Tahir said:

“Without the love and prayers of Khilafat, I am certain the result would have been different. Khilafat is the reason that my son is still alive today. It is the reason that he is laughing and crying and playing and feeding just like any other child his age. Surely, other people who are not Ahmadis would have felt hopeless but we never did because we knew that Huzoor’s prayers can move mountains.”

Tahir continued:

“We recently went back to the hospital for a check-up and the doctors who saw Ashar on the day he was born were amazed at his recovery and one of them actually said that he could not believe it was the same boy and he said that ‘It must have been the prayers that saved him’.”

Thus, where Huzoor said to Tahir at the inauguration of Baitul Ehsan that his son was fine, Tahir and his family were well aware that it was due to the prayers of Khalifa-Waqt that their child was well and healthy.

Huzoor's preparation for the Peace Symposium

As one event ended, another event drew closer. The Peace Symposium was just days away.

The way Huzoor prepares for the Peace Symposium is a lesson in diligence and care. Where Huzoor is guided by Allah the Almighty, he also takes the time to assess the state of the world, the major issues of the time and see what is being written and said by politicians, journalists, academics and many others.

Thus, more than two months before the Peace Symposium, Huzoor instructed me to gather together media reports or columns from recent months, which were related to various contemporary issues affecting the peace and security of the world.

In total, I presented around 65 articles or columns to Huzoor. In addition, Huzoor asked me to take out certain quotes from a book that he had read excerpts from called *'The Silk Roads, A New History of the World'*.

With all the briefings prepared and presented, Huzoor called me to his office on the morning of Monday 12 March at 11am.

Over the course of the next hour, Huzoor looked through the various briefings, highlighted portions and made notes. Where Huzoor found an article of interest, he would confirm the name of the author and where it had been printed to ensure that they were reputable sources.

During that preparatory hour, Huzoor also studied the Holy Quran and the books of the Promised Messiah (as). He also looked at some reports on his iPad.

Thereafter, at around midday, Huzoor said that he would now dictate and I should start typing whatever he said.

Huzoor started by saying that some people might wonder what was the benefit of holding Peace Symposiums because during the past 14 or 15 years the peace and security of the world had deteriorated significantly.

Yet, Huzoor said that our faith as Muslims demanded that we never give up in our efforts to bring all people, *'whether rich or poor, powerful or oppressed, religious or irreligious towards peace and justice'*.

It was a beautiful opening and thereafter I continued to sit with Huzoor until the time of Zuhr prayer, as he spoke in detail about poverty being a defining factor and root cause of much of the world's conflict.

Huzoor also spoke of how hypocrisy stained much of the world's foreign policies. How Governments and leaders would call for peace, yet at the same time made every effort to sell weapons of mass destruction that were fuelling conflicts.

One point that really struck me was when Huzoor spoke about how foreign policies were directly contradicting efforts to stop climate change.

Huzoor said:

“A major focus of the international community is climate change and a desire to keep the air that we breathe clean. Is there anyone who thinks that heavy bombardment has no effect on the atmosphere? Furthermore, if peace ever does prevail in the war-torn countries, their towns and cities will have to be rebuilt from scratch, and this in itself will be a huge industry that will cause an increase in harmful emissions and pollution. Thus, on the one hand, we are trying to save the planet, yet with our other hand, we are senselessly destroying it.”

Later, Huzoor referred to some of the columns that he had been through, published by Western publications and dictated the parts that he wanted to quote.

As we reached Zuhr time, Huzoor told me to save whatever I had typed and to return at 3.30pm, as he wished to give further dictation.

As I left Huzoor’s office, I thought to myself that whatever Huzoor had dictated so far was captivating and emotional and would surely suffice as an address on its own.

However, when I returned later in the afternoon, I realised that Huzoor wished to add a further very important element to his address.

Where Huzoor had spoken about the state of the world in the morning, he now spoke about Islam and highlighted the solutions that Islam had given in order to establish peace.

He explained how Islam had no link to extremism and that the Holy Prophet (sa) sought inter-faith dialogue and peace at all times.

During this period, Huzoor also read out a quote from the *Silk Roads* book that included the word '*assuage*'.

After reading it, Huzoor asked me how the word was pronounced.

It is not a commonly used word and so for a moment I was unsure but then I said:

“Huzoor, it is pronounced ‘as-swayj’”

Upon this, Huzoor asked if I was sure.

In response, I got confused and said:

“Huzoor, it might be au-saaj actually!”

Huzoor said:

“I think it is as you said the first time but we can check later.”

Later, I did check online, and the initial pronunciation was right. I'm not sure where the second pronunciation I came up with came from!

Huzoor concluded the dictation of his address in the most beautiful fashion by giving the ultimate example of forgiveness manifested by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) following the *Victory of Makkah*.

Guided by God

As the dictation ended, Huzoor told me of how his address had been inspired by Allah.

Huzoor said:

“Even this morning I was unsure of what points to make in this year’s address but then Allah the Almighty helped and guided me because I was reading a passage of the Promised Messiah (as) after Fajr and he had quoted the verse of the Holy Quran in which the Victory of Makkah was mentioned and how Holy Prophet (sa) forgave all of those who had opposed him. Immediately, it came to my mind that this is how I should conclude my address and thereafter I was able to formulate the rest of my notes knowing that this will be the conclusion.”

Hearing these words was very emotional and I thanked Huzoor for sharing how Allah the Almighty had guided him that day.

It was a truly precious moment for me to witness and hear first-hand from Allah’s appointed Khalifa.

Once I had typed up the entire address, I presented it to Huzoor and informed that the word count was around 4,500.

Huzoor remarked:

“That is too many and so I will have to cut it down then.”

Over the next couple of days, Huzoor continued his normal office routine and daily activities but, in addition, he spent time looking over his notes, editing them and entirely redrafting certain paragraphs.

Thereafter on the morning of the Peace Symposium itself, Huzoor told me that he had reduced the text by 800 words and so the word count was now around 3,700.

I think the main reason Huzoor chose to cut down the word count was for the benefit of the non-Ahmadi audience, as generally most guests are not used to longer speeches.

However, personally, I felt a tinge of regret and sadness that hundreds of Huzoor’s blessed words that he dictated would not be heard.

The Promise of Allah the Almighty

A day before the Peace Symposium, I mentioned to Huzoor that the weather forecast for the next day was for snow.

I was taken somewhat aback by Huzoor’s response.

Huzoor said:

“It is possible that a few less people will come but it does not matter. Even when the leaders come they do not listen to us or change their policies.”

Despite his grief for the state of mankind, Huzoor’s absolute trust in Allah was also clearly apparent.

Huzoor further said:

“We will never stop trying. We must do our work, whether they come or not, whether they listen or not. Ultimately, the world will be reformed through the efforts of our Jamaat because this is the Promise of Allah the Almighty!”

I felt a surge of emotion inside me as I heard Huzoor’s words and his complete conviction that the efforts of our Jamaat would never be rendered futile, Insha’Allah.

A last-minute flood!

The day of the Peace Symposium had finally arrived. The weather was bitterly cold for much of the day and there were intervals of snow. However, with the *Grace of Allah*, the event proved extremely blessed in all respects.

Whilst a few guests withdrew at the last moment because of the adverse weather conditions, still, almost 600 guests came to attend the event, whilst thousands of people watched the MTA live-stream.

Huzoor was due to arrive any time from 5.45pm and prior to his arrival, there was a hive of activity in various locations at Baitul Futuh.

In the main hall, final touches were being made, guests had started to arrive and were being given tours of the Mosque, whilst MTA was checking the sound system and ensuring everything was ready to go.

Just as there appeared to be some calm, a disaster occurred! Literally minutes before Huzoor's arrival, the large corridor connecting *Tahir Hall* to the *Exhibition* area, where Huzoor and dignitaries were soon to walk through, became flooded!

I nearly slipped as I walked from one end of the corridor to the other but thankfully I was just able to keep on two feet!

Jamaat members were frantically trying to mop up the area, as Amir Sahib UK and other senior members of the Jamaat paced back and forth trying to ensure that every effort was made to contain the water.

I asked what had happened and was told that a Khadim had tried to move a washing machine stored nearby and in the process had burst a water pipe.

Seeing how wet the floor was I thought it would be very difficult to dry it before Huzoor arrived. However, on such occasions, we see the unique spirit of the Jamaat and observe the *Help* of Allah.

Initially, it did not seem as though the floor was drying but as the number of Khuddam helping increased, suddenly, a few moments before Huzoor was

due to arrive, the water started to recede and the floor eventually became dry.

In the end, perhaps it was all a blessing in disguise, as the floor got an extra clean and scrub before the event! However, I think Amir Sahib and his team would have preferred to avoid the headache!

Reflections of a host

It seems that every year there are certain things that cause last minute panic or concern before major events! This is something Fareed Ahmad, *National Secretary Umoor-e-Kharija (External Affairs)* attested to.

As *Umoor-e-Kharija Secretary*, Fareed sahib is closely involved with the running of the event and for several years, he has also had the honour of compering the event in the presence of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih (*aba*).

Fareed sahib explained some of the last minute issues he had witnessed, as well as reflecting on how the Peace Symposium had grown and developed over the years.

Fareed sahib said:

“I remember one year when the peace prize winner had travelled from overseas to the event and we had personally received them from the airport and taken them to the hotel, checked them in and made sure the programme was explained and all arrangements were in place and

understood. They arrived after an overnight flight early Saturday morning and wanted to rest before the event in the evening."

Fareed sahib continued:

"The peace prize winner was due to arrive at Baitul Futuh by 5.30pm for press interviews but when the car reached the hotel they were told that the guest was not there! They searched the entire hotel but could not find them! It goes without saying that this caused a 'mild' panic - the clock was ticking for the start of the event and we had no idea where our peace prize winner was!"

Explaining how they finally tracked down the key guest, Fareed sahib said:

"After 45 minutes of phone calls, searching, discussions and explaining to Amir Sahib UK that we had lost one of our key guests it came to light that the hotel had phoned the room and knocked on the door and received no answer - but they had not gone in to the room as the hotel's policy was that forced entry was only allowed in an emergency."

Fareed sahib continued:

"We were at pains to say that by all definitions this was an emergency for us and they should enter the room forthwith! They finally agreed and just as they were about to do so the peace prize winner emerged from the room wondering what all the fuss was about. It was very clear that they were severely jet lagged! We all breathed a collective sigh of relief and managed to get them to Baitul Futuh just in time!"

Explaining more generally about the Peace Symposium, Fareed sahib said:

“I recall how Huzoor said in his address at the 2014 symposium that the Peace Symposium had 'become an established fixture in the calendar of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community' and I remember thinking how blessed we were to partake in something that the Khalifa of the time was describing as an established fixture for the Jamaat. Alhamdolillah.”

I also asked Fareed sahib what it was like to host the formal event.

In response, Fareed sahib said:

“It is always an extremely nervous time for me! Hosting the event with the blessed presence of Huzoor is such a precious and honourable moment and you do not wish to let Huzoor down in any sense.”

Fareed sahib continued:

“Things do not always go to plan and one year I remember I was announcing the next speaker and I could not find the introduction for him! Luckily I knew a bit about the person so was able to say enough to welcome him but it could have been very embarrassing for me and for the event so Alhamdolillah I managed to scrape through but it was an important lesson for me.”

I asked Fareed sahib where this year's guests had come from and he informed that apart from the hundreds of British guests, 140 guests had come from abroad from 26 countries. The numbers of foreign guests and the

countries represented were increasing each year and in this way, the Peace Symposium had taken on an international significance.

Fareed sahib said:

“Having international guests is a true blessing and a privilege for the UK Jamaat and it brings immense benefit. Most importantly it provides an opportunity for Huzoor's message to reach many more people, both through the academics, parliamentarians and other dignitaries of those countries and also through the foreign journalists that attend the event.”

Fareed sahib continued:

“We have seen the media coverage increase through this and it is the graciousness of Huzoor that he gives so much time to meet all the guests over that weekend before, during and after the event. Like the UK Jalsa, I am sure this event will continue to grow and serve as an even more important international platform for the whole world, Insha'Allah.”

Fareed sahib was right. Each year the Peace Symposium continued to grow and develop.

After months of planning and preparation, the Peace Symposium 2018 was about to begin.

End of Part 1

Any comments or feedback: abid.khan@pressahmadiyya.com