

JALSA SALANA UK 2016

PART 1

A Personal Account

By Abid Khan

A London Diary – an Introduction

During the past few years, I have had the blessed opportunity to travel with Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) to different parts of the world and I have written a number of personal diaries about his recent tours, in which I have described some of the blessings of Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya that I have witnessed first-hand.

For the last couple of years, a few people had suggested to me that I write a diary about Huzoor's life in the UK as well or at least about the UK Jalsa Salana. However, I was reluctant to do so and for two reasons.

First of all, at the UK Jalsa, the central media team, in which I serve, has the responsibility of attaining media coverage for the Jalsa. This requires a media campaign that begins several weeks before Jalsa and continues throughout the Jalsa days and even beyond. Thus, I was worried that if I sought to write a diary, I would be diverted somewhat from this duty given to our office by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba).

Secondly, I thought that if Huzoor ever desired for me to write a diary based here in the UK then he himself would instruct me to do so.

After Huzoor's tour of Scandinavia in May, I wrote a diary about that tour and after reading it Fahim Anwer sahib, the former *Sadr Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya UK*, contacted me and said that he hoped I would write a diary about the forthcoming UK Jalsa. It so happened that later that day when I met Huzoor he asked me if I had received any feedback to the tour diaries

and so I mentioned what Fahim sahib had suggested. Immediately, Huzoor looked up from the office mail that he was checking and said:

“This year you should spend the week before Jalsa and the week after Jalsa with me and then you can write a diary for the UK Jalsa as well.”

Huzoor then smiled before adding:

“You can write that you are making this London diary due to popular demand!”

I was extremely delighted to receive this instruction because any opportunity to spend further time with Khalifatul Masih can only be classed as a huge blessing and privilege.

A friendly welcome

As instructed, I came to the Private Secretary’s office (PS Office) on the morning of Sunday 7 August. Though, I visit this office daily, I have to admit feeling quite nervous, as I did not want to disturb the daily routine of the office in any way and I was also unsure where to sit. Perhaps it is best described as being like the new boy at school!

Thankfully, two young friends of mine, *Abdul Khabir Rizwan* and *Mirza Athar Baig*, both *Waqf-e-Zindighis* (life devotees), welcomed me to the section of the Private Secretary’s office where they worked. Thus, I pulled up a chair and sat on a table adjacent to where Khabir was seated.

A Twitter conversation

Apart from his daily routine work, Huzoor spent much of that week preparing for the Jalsa. Certainly at every Jalsa in which Huzoor attends he is extremely busy but at UK Jalsa his activities and responsibilities are particularly heightened.

In fact, during those days, I saw a conversation on Twitter that highlighted this point. An Ahmadi lady had posted that she was looking forward to the UK Jalsa because Huzoor would *Insha'Allah* deliver four addresses. Following her message, someone else responded by saying that actually it would be five addresses, because the *Friday Sermon* is also a part of Jalsa.

Thereafter, another person said that he considered Huzoor had seven speeches at Jalsa UK, because in his *Friday Sermons*, both the week before Jalsa and the week after, Huzoor would normally discuss Jalsa UK.

Finally, another person commented that he considered the *International Bai'at* to also be a like an address and so he considered Huzoor would have eight addresses at Jalsa!

Later that day I told Huzoor about this Twitter conversation and Huzoor smiled and laughed.

Anyway, the coming days would show me that Huzoor's addresses were just the tip of the iceberg and there were many other activities that most people were not aware of.

A long walk

That morning, I met a young *Khadim* who told me his wife was pregnant and he mentioned how every day he was nervous and anxious that everything was ok. He asked me, if in my experience, this anxiety would last for the entire nine months or whether the tension would lessen with time.

I told him, how both times my wife Mala was pregnant, we were nervous and worried throughout and that Huzoor had told me that the nine months of pregnancy was a time for prayer and *Sadqa*.

I also told him a story from 2013, when Mala was pregnant with our first son, Mahid. She was due to give birth on 27 April and Huzoor was set to depart for a tour of the United States and Canada on 4 May.

Huzoor had most graciously included me in his *Qafila* and so I was keen for the baby to come on time and not be delayed! However, Mahid decided to come at his own speed and so Mala became a few days overdue and it was getting closer and closer to Huzoor's tour. The clock was ticking!

After a few days of her being overdue, Huzoor advised me to take Mala for a walk as this was known to help trigger labour. Thus, the next morning we left our house and walked and walked for upwards of 3 hours! That afternoon when I reported for Mulaqat, the first thing I said to Huzoor, very confidently and with a degree of pride, was:

"Huzoor, I followed your advice and so took Mala for a 3 hour walk today!"

Upon, hearing this, Huzoor looked at me with a degree of astonishment and bewilderment, which lives with me till today. Huzoor said:

“Allah rehm karay! (Allah have mercy!) I meant for you to take her for short 10minute walks and then to give her a break and then go for another 10minute walk after some time!”

I remember that my initial pride and confidence was instantly replaced by complete embarrassment and horror! Even now, some years later, sometimes Mala reminds me of the fact that I took her on that 3-hour walk prior to Mahid’s birth!

It so happened that Mahid was born on Friday, 3 May 2013 and though Huzoor’s departure was not until the next morning, when I reported for Mulaqat that evening, Huzoor said:

“You should now stay in London for a few days until Mala and the baby are settled and then join me in America.”

It was an example of Huzoor’s love and concern for family members and their rights. Whereas, once Mahid was born, I was ready and hoping to travel to America with Huzoor the next morning, he decided that I should spend a few days with my family before joining.

Whilst the Khadim I narrated this story could not control his laughter when I told him about the 3-hour walk, he also realised that the nerves and concerns of pregnancy were likely to last until the very last minute.

Huzoor's attention to detail

As I was seated in the PS Office, I noticed that *Muhammad Ghalib Javaid*, a *Missionary* who serves in the office, was photocopying various documents. I noticed that the papers he was copying were verses from different *Nazms* (poems) of the Promised Messiah (as). Some of the verses had ticks next to them and I could tell from the style that Huzoor had ticked them.

Ghalib told me that each verse of the Quran recited at Jalsa and each verse, of every *Nazm* recited at Jalsa was personally chosen by Huzoor. Further, Huzoor himself chooses who does the recitation in each session and he decides the topics of speeches and the speakers.

Normally, *Officer Jalsa Gah* would send sample CDs of different people reciting the Quran and Nazms and Huzoor would listen to them and then decide.

Upon hearing this, I thought to myself how Huzoor keeps such a close eye on every aspect of Jalsa.

Daily media briefing

During my stay in the PS Office, I would continue to meet Huzoor in the early evening in his office as I do during the rest of the year.

In such meetings, I normally enter Huzoor's office and after offering '*salam*', I take a seat opposite Huzoor.

On most occasions, Huzoor is already engaged in work and so I wait until Huzoor indicates that he is ready for my report. Normally, after a few seconds or minutes, Huzoor would say to me, ***“What have you brought?”*** or ***“What is your report?”***

Thereafter, I present a daily media briefing to Huzoor, in which I summarise and narrate media stories from around the world, both related to the Jamaat and also those related to world affairs.

Sometimes, I will include commentaries or opinion pieces that have been written and which I think may be of interest to Huzoor. Occasionally, I include a lighter story or something that I think perhaps Huzoor will enjoy or find amusing. Certainly, any opportunity to see Huzoor’s smile or to see him laugh is priceless.

Often, there are stories relating to Islam in which false allegations have been made or there have been terrorist attacks. On such occasions, I will seek Huzoor’s guidance about how as an office we should respond. Our *Press & Media office* is extremely fortunate to receive this daily guidance from Huzoor about our activities.

Further, there are national Jamaats who will have local issues and need help or assistance and so they may forward their questions to Huzoor through our office.

On such occasions, Huzoor will dictate responses or guidance there and then. Invariably, Huzoor’s guidance is filled with wisdom and always based upon Islam’s teachings.

On certain occasions, such as where there has been an attack in which many people have died, Huzoor will instruct that the response should go out in his name, whilst on other occasions he instructs that the response can go out on behalf of our office.

One of the greatest blessings I have personally felt associated with Khilafat is the conviction the words of Khalifatul Masih give you.

Sometimes, my team and I could spend days or even weeks deliberating over an issue and we would all have differing views or opinions. Yet, as soon as we get Huzoor's advice or guidance, we put aside our previously held beliefs and move forward with total conviction that what Huzoor has said is right.

Occasionally, Huzoor's response to an issue may initially surprise us but we have firm belief that there is wisdom in whatever Huzoor says and with time subsequently the wisdom and underlying benefit of Huzoor's words always become crystal clear.

An important lesson

During the days preceding Jalsa Salana, I sought Huzoor's guidance and prayers regarding our media campaign for Jalsa.

One evening, I presented to Huzoor a draft *Press Release*, which our team had drafted, which we intended to send to the media in advance of the Jalsa as part of our media campaign.

In the *Press Release*, we had written that 40,000 people were expected to attend the Jalsa Salana. As a team, we had discussed this figure on a number of occasions and felt comfortable including it because we anticipated that the number of guests could potentially reach 40,000 given that it was the 50th Jalsa Salana UK.

However, in my heart, I had a slight feeling of unease because I knew that Huzoor had always instructed me to be completely honest and to avoid all forms of exaggeration. Nonetheless, whilst I had a feeling that Huzoor may question this, at the same time I had convinced myself that putting 40,000 was justified.

Within a second of looking at the Press Release, Huzoor said:

“Why have you put 40,000 are going to attend?”

Thereafter, Huzoor crossed out the figure and replaced it with 30,000. After doing so, Huzoor looked at me and very firmly said:

“Remember there is never any benefit to falsehood or exaggeration.”

Huzoor’s words were said so firmly and clearly that I did not even dare to offer any justification or excuse and instead I apologised and sought Huzoor’s forgiveness for this misjudgement.

I truly felt very ashamed, especially given the fact that I had a prior feeling Huzoor may not approve and yet still had gone ahead and included the figure of 40,000.

In the draft Press Release, we had also mentioned the terrorist group *Daesh* (*ISIS*). In order to try and garner the attention of the media, we had written that more people would be attending the Jalsa UK in order to spread peace, than the entire membership of *Daesh*.

Upon seeing this, Huzoor crossed off with his pen all mention of *Daesh* from the Press Release. After doing so, he looked up at me and said:

“There is no need to focus or write about Daesh in our Jalsa Press Release. You should focus on the spirituality of Jalsa and its true objectives.”

As Huzoor said these words, I was reminded of Huzoor’s words at the Peace Symposium in March that ***“publicity was the oxygen sustaining terrorist groups”*** and I realised we ourselves had fallen into the trap of seeking to give them publicity.

Of course, wherever we are asked about terrorism or extremism, we respond and Huzoor encourages us to respond openly and with courage. However, an official *Press Release* about Jalsa was not the place to focus upon terrorism or a terrorist group.

As I walked out of the *Mulaqat*, I felt ashamed and embarrassed. It is one thing to make a mistake based on ignorance, but it is quite another to make a mistake when you have prior experience. For a number of years, I had received Huzoor’s guidance on such matters and so I had no excuse and felt bitterly disappointed in myself.

I went for a walk afterwards and communicated Huzoor's guidance to the rest of my team and thereafter I repeatedly offered *Istighfar* and also took out some *Sadqa*.

The blessings in Huzoor's words always comes to pass. Until that day we had not received any confirmation from a single journalist or media organisation that they would attend Jalsa Salana. Yet, the very next morning we started getting a number of confirmations and in the end the media coverage was, *Alhamdolillah*, far beyond our expectations.

An example of Huzoor's love

That entire evening I was upset, thinking that I had disappointed Huzoor but the very next morning, when I returned to the PS Office, I checked my office tray, where normally letters or mail for my office are posted and I saw that Huzoor had sent two packets of coffee as a gift for me.

It is always such an honour to receive any gift from Huzoor but particularly on that day it felt as though a heavy weight had been lifted from my heart. Huzoor's grace, compassion and forgiveness knows no bounds.

Huzoor's guidance to Officer Jalsa Salana

On the afternoon of 7 August 2016, the inspection of the Jalsa Salana UK took place. The UK Jamaat is extremely fortunate that each year, Huzoor inspects in detail the arrangements for Jalsa Salana. Traditionally, this has taken place on the Sunday before Jalsa begins and it was the same this year as well.

In reality, Huzoor is directly involved in the arrangements and preparation for Jalsa Salana from the very outset.

I spoke with the *Officer Jalsa Salana*, Mohammad Nasser Khan sahib, who elaborated on this. He explained that no major decision pertaining to Jalsa Salana UK was ever made without the prayers, guidance and approval of Khalifatul Masih.

Nasser Khan sahib said:

“First of all, it is Huzoor who personally approves the administrative committee charged with organising the Jalsa Salana. Thereafter, Huzoor kindly meets me and other members of the committee regularly in Mulaqat and answers our questions and guides us in the right direction.”

Explaining, Huzoor’s love for the participants of Jalsa Salana, Nasser sahib said:

“I have always seen how Huzoor particularly keeps in mind the comfort and ease of the participants of Jalsa – hence last year during Mulaqat he advised us to make the flooring in the main marquees more comfortable, as many guests sit on the floor for hours on end. Based on this instruction we were able to source a special underlay that made the flooring much softer and comfortable for people to sit on.”

Nasser sahib continued:

“Furthermore, the sermon Huzoor delivers the week before Jalsa is extremely valuable for us because normally Huzoor gives special guidance for the workers and volunteers at Jalsa and highlights certain aspects that we should pay particular attention to.”

Nasser sahib told me how Huzoor was particularly mindful of how guests were treated at Jalsa Salana. He mentioned an incident from the 2015 Jalsa Salana, when the *Ashanti King*, who is extremely revered amongst his people, had travelled from Ghana to attend.

Nasser sahib told me that whilst the *King* wished to address the Jalsa, his personal protocol was such that he was unwilling to remove his sandals at the stage area. This was a problem because the stage area was also used for *Salat* and so all people who went on the stage removed their shoes.

Explaining how this issue was resolved, Nasser sahib said:

“Our idea, which we proposed to Huzoor, was to set up a microphone on the floor, next to the stage, so that the Ashanti King could address the Jalsa and keep his shoes on without having to come on the stage. However, when we informed Huzoor about this he was not satisfied.”

Naseer sahib continued:

“Huzoor did not wish for us to offend the King in any way and so he instructed that a secondary carpet should be laid temporarily on the

stage leading from the stairs to the lectern. The King could walk upon this carpet with his shoes and after his speech it could be removed. Huzoor's words were filled with such wisdom, wherein the purity of the Salat area was maintained, whilst at the same time the protocol of the King was observed and no offence was caused."

Inspection of Jalsa Salana 2016

On 7 August 2016, Huzoor departed from Masjid Fazl at 3.15pm for the inspection. In recent years, Huzoor had visited four different sites for the inspection – *Baitul Futuh, Jamia Ahmadiyya, Islamabad* and *finally Hadeeqatul Mahdi*.

Due to construction work at *Islamabad*, where the Jamaat is building a new Mosque, this year Jalsa arrangements could not be made there. Hence, the inspection this year included *Baitul Futuh, Jamia Ahmadiyya* and *Hadeeqatul Mahdi*.

Inspection at Baitul Futuh

The first stop was at *Baitul Futuh* and there also the situation was different to last year.

There are various *Nizamats (Jalsa offices)* set up at Baitul Futuh but this year many of them were based in the rear car park of the Mosque in different cabins or in a marquee. The reason was that most office space and two of the main halls at Baitul Futuh were destroyed by the fire that took place in September 2015.

Anyway, Huzoor visited different *Nizamats*, including ‘*car passes*’, ‘*accommodation*’ and the Baitul Futuh *langhar* (kitchen).

Huzoor also visited the *langhar* and tasted some *daal* (lentils) with *roti* (*Asian flat-bread*). Upon seeing the *roti*, Huzoor remarked that it seemed to be whiter in colour than previous years and whether the flour had been changed.

The fact Huzoor pointed this out, suggested to me that Huzoor may have been concerned that less whole-wheat flour had been used as whole-wheat is considerably healthier than more refined flours, such as white flour.

Visit to Bookshop

Huzoor also visited the bookshop where the *in-charge*, Ahsan Ahmedi sahib, showed Huzoor the new books that had recently been stocked and would be available at Jalsa.

Huzoor asked Arshad sahib and Amir sahib UK what they thought of the newly reprinted versions of ‘*Noah’s Ark*’ (*Kashti-Nuh*) and Huzoor’s own book ‘*World Crisis: Pathway to Peace*’.

In particular, Huzoor asked them whether they liked the redesigned covers of both of these books. The covers, were in fact much more powerful and pertinent to the themes of the books.

Whereas, most Jamaat books have quite simple covers, these books had very emotive and figurative designs.

Huzoor then said:

“I actually personally designed both of the covers of these books!”

It was amazing to hear that Huzoor had designed the book covers and it was another example of how he guides the Jamaat on so many levels.

It was also interesting that Huzoor first asked Amir sahib and Arshad sahib what they thought and only after they had given their opinion did he inform them that he had designed the cover.

If he had told them before, then perhaps their love for Khilafat, would have clouded their opinion and Huzoor wanted to hear their honest opinion and critique.

This in itself is a lesson for the rest of us. Huzoor is so humble and listens to people's opinions and desires no praise, whereas many other people are often guilty of seeking or desiring the praise of others.

Inspection at Jamia Ahmadiyya

Huzoor departed from Baitul Futuh at 4pm and the Qafila then travelled onwards to Jamia, which is located in the British countryside town of Haslemere.

At Jamia, many guests from abroad are accommodated and so Huzoor inspected all aspects of the accommodation and also the arrangements for food for the guests.

As, Huzoor returned to his car he noticed that some of the windows at the front of the Jamia building were in a state of disrepair and also that they had the potential to slam open or shut if there was a heavy draft and in this respect were a safety hazard.

Huzoor instructed Nasser Khan sahib to replace the existing windows with double glazing and to ensure that they were all safe.

Upon hearing this, Nasser Khan sahib said that as the Jamia building was an officially 'listed' building, it was very difficult to make any cosmetic changes to the property.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

"Being a listed building does not mean you are not permitted to maintain the building or do suitable repairs. It only means that you cannot change the shape or the look of the building."

Huzoor's knowledge of such things and his eye for detail is far greater than many people who are experts in such fields.

Inspection at Hadeeqatul Mahdi

The Qafila departed from Jamia Ahmadiyya at 5.15pm and drove straight to Hadeeqatul Mahdi, arriving at 5.45pm.

Naturally, as Hadeeqatul Mahdi is the actual venue for the Jalsa it is the part of the inspection that takes the longest.

Each year, there is at least one department that I see during Huzoor's inspection that I would otherwise have no idea existed. For example, in 2015 there was a recycling and waste management Nizamat.

On this occasion, one department where Huzoor spent a significant amount of time was the '*Command Centre*', which is a hub for security surveillance at Jalsa.



Various, high quality *CCTV* cameras had been set up across the site to ensure the security of all the participants of Jalsa and they were constantly monitored at the *Command Centre*.

Each area of the Jalsa site had been categorised with a 'grid reference' and so if there was any issue noted on the cameras then those Khuddam on-duty near the incident could be notified.



After being briefed about the centre, Huzoor enquired that if there was any incident noted on camera, how long would be the response time to get somebody physically to a specific location.

Upon being informed that the maximum response time would be five minutes, Huzoor said the maximum should be three minutes.

It is for this type of guidance that inspections by Khalifatul Masih are extremely beneficial. They are not just a meaningless tradition or ritual but have a distinct purpose. Based on this advice, *Sadr Khuddamul Ahmadiyya* would know that he would need to increase the number of Khuddam on duty so that the maximum response time could be brought down.

Regarding 'security', sometimes the opponents of Ahmadiyyat, in particular those non-Ahmadi Muslims who may have Ahmadi relatives or who themselves were brought up as Ahmadis, often write that the Jamaat's focus on security is 'pointless' and 'unnecessary'.

Even before this year's Jalsa, I read a similar blog, in which the writer wrote that at Jalsa you see Khuddam facing bushes or trees and alleged that they were 'standing aimlessly' and 'wasting their time'.

What such people fail to realise is that the focus of *Khalifa-Waqt* and of our Jamaat on security is based on love and the unique bond of brotherhood that exists within our Jamaat. Huzoor feels the pain of every single Ahmadi and so we take every possible precaution to mitigate risks. If even one person came to harm, it would cause devastation and pain throughout the Jamaat.

Whilst, those who raise allegations have no issue at the fact that hundreds of thousands of pounds are spent policing other events, such as sports matches or concerts, they deem the fact that thousands of Ahmadis are selflessly volunteering their time and services for duties to be pointless and a waste of time.

Visit to Roti Plant

One of the parts of Jalsa inspection that I enjoy the most is Huzoor's visit to the *roti plant* where during the course of Jalsa Salana, hundreds of thousands of fresh *rotis* are produced.

When you enter the *roti plant* for the first time and smell the fresh *rotis* and see them passing by on the conveyor belt with wonderful pockets of hot air blowing into the flat bread, it is then that you really realise that Jalsa is finally upon us.

I have to admit that each time, I secretly hope that somebody will pass me one of the hot *rotis* to take a bite from! I always get hungry walking during the inspection!

On this occasion, though the wonderful smell of the *rotis* was apparent, we did not see the sight of the *rotis* passing by on the conveyor belt. It was only as Huzoor was about to leave the *roti plant* that finally a few fresh *rotis* were made and they were taken to Huzoor who tasted them after dipping them in *daal*.

Over the past couple of years the *roti plant* has played another significant role. It has become a means of *Tabligh*.

Whenever, any journalist comes to Jalsa our team takes them to the *roti plant* and they are left amazed and transfixed by how the *roti* is produced. Some have even chosen to do live reports from the *roti plant*.

The journalists invariably leave the *roti plant* in a better mood, having sampled the warm hot bread. I remember, a BBC journalist who came in 2015 told me that he could not stop himself and so had eaten four *rotis* fresh off the conveyor and had not enjoyed himself so much for a very long time!

Being ready for all contingencies

Thereafter, Huzoor walked to various other *Nizamats* and departments. Upon being shown a large marquee that had been set up as accommodation for Ahmadis to sleep in, the person in-charge informed Huzoor that the Jamaat had made every effort to ensure that the accommodation was warm throughout and that insulation was as good as it could be.

Hearing this, Huzoor replied by saying:

“That is good but have you also set up a cooling system if there is a need? The weather forecast for the Jalsa days is warm and so you should be ready for all eventualities and not just one.”

As he walked across the site, Huzoor saw some large-scale tractors.

Upon seeing them, Huzoor said:

“You should ensure that such large vehicles, like the tractors, are secured each evening and whenever they are not in use. We have already seen in France recently where a terrorist did an attack using a

lorry and so heavy machinery or vehicles can be misused and, God forbid, used as a weapon.”

This point reiterated why Huzoor focuses on security – it is because of the risks that are present in the world today. Again, this was a risk that others had not really considered until pointed out by Huzoor.

Huzoor’s guidance to Lajna Imaillah

Huzoor visited the *Lajna* side and gave them direct guidance, in particular to the Lajna security checking team.

A relative of mine, Dr Fariha Khan, who served as the *Naib Nazima-Ala*, later told me Huzoor had particularly emphasised the need to be vigilant on the ladies side as well. She said this was something Huzoor had also drawn the attention of Lajna to in the past.

Fariha baji said:

“Over the years I have seen a massive progress and improvement in our professionalism in our Jalsa arrangements and that has solely been because of the direct guidance we have received from Huzoor Aqdas. For example, one year Huzoor asked me if the security checking team had to pass through security. Huzoor said that it was essential that they were always checked as well. This was an extremely valuable instruction and highlighted the fact that we should never be complacent and we should never show any form of favoritism in our duties. ”

Fariha baji continued:

“Huzoor checks the arrangements in detail, for example in the past he has himself gone through the security arch to test it and asked us about the sensitivity of the metal detectors. Huzoor also advised us that no woman should pass through the checking area with her face covered and that we should also check things like pushchairs and walking sticks. Further, Huzoor has also instructed us to train the security girls in self-defence and martial arts.”

She also told me that this year Huzoor had mentioned to *Sadr Lajna UK* an incident that I had narrated in the diary I had written about Huzoor’s tour of Denmark earlier in the year.

I had mentioned how the young Lajna on security duty in Denmark had not recognized Huzoor’s *Head of Security*, Major Mahmood sahib or other members of the *Qafila* including me and so she had insisted on thoroughly checking all of us. Fariha baji told me that Huzoor had appreciated this and had told Sadr Sahiba that he wanted the UK Lajna team to show similar bravery and courage in their duties.

Address to Jalsa volunteers

Following the conclusion of the inspection, Huzoor was escorted to the main *Jalsa Gah*, where he addressed the workers and volunteers of Jalsa about the importance of their duties.

In particular, Huzoor said that every duty-holder should maintain the highest standards of courtesy and etiquette at all times and should focus on prayer as much as possible.



Huzoor said:

“Every volunteer and worker should display excellent manners and etiquettes at all time. They should ensure that they do not say or do anything that could cause offence or worry to any of the guests.”

Huzoor continued:

“Only through prayer and the worship of Allah will our efforts and our work be blessed. This is the secret to our success! Without Allah’s Grace and Mercy we cannot achieve anything.”

Inspection of MTA

Following the conclusion of Huzoor's address and a silent prayer, the volunteers moved to the other side of the *Jalsa Gah*, for a dinner in the presence of Huzoor.

Whilst everyone was getting ready, Huzoor visited the *MTA* offices and studios that had been set up at Hadeeqatul Mahdi. In the past, MTA had mainly used marquees and tents but this year they had hired caravan style offices that were both portable and all-weather friendly.

Upon visiting the office of the newly established *MTA Africa* channel, Huzoor noticed that the majority of volunteers were Asian.

Seeing this, Huzoor said to those staff members present:

“This is an African channel and for the African people and so there should be more Africans in the team in future.”

Throughout history and sadly even today, African people have been the victims of racism and injustice. The African Continent continues to be the most deprived part of the world and even in the developed world people with African heritage still often face discrimination and injustice.

The polar opposite of such racism is seen in the attitude of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) who is the greatest champion for the African people. Having lived in Ghana for 8 years, Huzoor has so much love and respect for the African people.

I have heard on a number of occasions, Huzoor say that African people are amongst the most talented people in the world and have the potential to lead the world if their leaders are fair and honest.

Furthermore, within our Jamaat, Huzoor has great love for African Ahmadi Muslims and also great expectations. In terms of MTA, Huzoor's comment that day showed that he desired for this channel to not only produce content for Africans but to be run by the African people themselves and for them to take pride in *their* channel.

Huzoor was then shown a '*meeting room*' within the MTA compound by an MTA Director. Upon seeing the room, Huzoor smiled and said:

"It is said that when a person has no work then he calls meetings."

Although, Huzoor made this comment in a light-hearted fashion, I think there was definitely a lesson within it for Jamaat workers. I occasionally hear comments that it seems there are meetings held just for the sake of holding meetings and what is needed is more action. I think this was in essence the point Huzoor was also making.

During the three days of Jalsa in there are non-stop activities and so it is rare to have the time for formal meetings and instead Jalsa is the time for action and hard work.

Whilst visiting MTA, Huzoor also looked at some clips of past Jalsas and documentaries that the *Programming Department* had prepared.

Whilst watching them, Huzoor turned to Director Programmes, Asif Basit sahib and said:

“I have a recording of Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) addressing Jalsa Salana.”

I was not sure of which clip Huzoor was referring to but on a couple of occasions I have been in Huzoor’s office when he has played parts of an address made by Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra). His voice was filled with majesty, beauty and truth.

A memorable joke

As Huzoor walked around the MTA complex, he also saw one of the MTA presenters, Mubarak Siddiqi sahib. Mubarak sahib is well known in the Jamaat both for presenting *Inthikhab-e-Sukhan* and also for his Urdu poetry.

Mubarak sahib is also known for telling jokes in a very enjoyable way. There is one particular joke he told that circulated all over *Whatsapp* and Jamaat circles a few years ago, in which he told of an incident at Baitul Futuh. He narrated the joke during the presence of Huzoor at a *Moshaira* at the Mahmood Hall at the Fazl Mosque.

Mubarak sahib narrated that once Huzoor was walking out of the Mosque having led *Salat* and was walking towards the *Tahir Hall*.

Upon seeing Mubarak Siddiqi sahib in the hall, Huzoor asked him if he had not offered 'Namaz' that day. As he was a poet, he had mistakenly thought Huzoor had said "Nazm" rather than Namaz!

Hence, in response, Mubarak Siddiqi sahib said:

"No Huzoor I have not!"

Upon hearing this, he said Huzoor asked again with a degree of concern:

"You have not?"

Mubarak sahib replied to Huzoor's follow-up question by saying:

"Huzoor I have not done it for a long time!"

I remember, when I first saw this clip, I, like countless other Ahmadis, could not control my laughter.

Upon seeing Mubarak sahib at the Jalsa inspection, Huzoor turned towards him and said:

"Mubarak sahib, Jalsa is not a time for jokes when presenting."

It was a brief comment and Huzoor said it very kindly but it had a lasting impact upon me. It showed how Huzoor guarded the sanctity and spirituality of Jalsa at all times.

Even though, on other occasions, jokes are to be enjoyed and Huzoor himself enjoys, Huzoor made it clear that Jalsa was never to be treated in a light-hearted fashion.

New moon prayer

As we left the *MTA* section, Nasser Khan sahib escorted Huzoor towards the main marquee. Normally, Huzoor's walking pace is quite fast but on this occasion Huzoor was walking at a more leisurely speed. Nasser sahib, perhaps used to Huzoor's normal speed, continued to walk faster.

Upon seeing this, Huzoor said:

“Nasser sahib, why are you rushing? I am walking slowly on purpose so that everyone has time to get ready for Namaz.”

As Huzoor continued to walk outside the main Jalsa Gah, he noticed the moon in the distance. Huzoor enquired if it was a 'new moon' to which *Sadr Majlis Ansarullah UK*, Dr Chaudhry Ijaz-ur-Rehman sahib responded by saying he was unsure.

Huzoor said:

“Whether it is a brand new moon or not, we are seeing it for the first time.”

Huzoor then turned towards the moon and lifted his hands up to pray, in accordance with the tradition of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) whenever a new moon was sighted.

An affectionate moment

As he continued to wait patiently for *Maghreb* time and for all Ahmadis to get ready for *Namaz*, Huzoor looked in the direction of his young grandchild, *Saad* (son of Mirza Waqas Ahmad) and Huzoor asked him if he was tired having walked along with the *Qafila* throughout the inspection.

In reply, *Saad* looked at his grandfather and shook his head and said he was not tired. It was a very affectionate moment.

Checking Production equipment

Just before *Namaz* began, Huzoor also walked over to an area where *MTA Production* had put out some of their equipment. Noticing it, Huzoor called Munir Odeh sahib (*Director Production*) and asked him details about the equipment being used by MTA at Jalsa.

Huzoor asked how many cameras would be used and the cost of hiring additional cameras and what each camera was needed for.

Having been able to serve as a Board Member of MTA International during the past few years, I have seen how Huzoor personally keeps a very close eye on the affairs of MTA.

I have also seen how despite the significant costs involved, the expenditure of MTA is far less than many other television channels who have far less reach and far less content.

Return to London

The day concluded as Huzoor led the *Maghreb* and *Isha* prayers before returning to Masjid Fazl. By the time the Qafila arrived back in London it was around 10.30pm.

Some of the Jalsa volunteers had come from even further afield. One lady, who lived around 2 hours away, told me that she had come to the inspection on her own and by the time she returned home it was well after midnight.

She told me that whilst she was driving home she felt both tired and a degree of nerves being out so late on her own.

Perhaps it is out of necessity but hearing her story made me wonder if in future the UK Jamaat could arrange the Jalsa inspection earlier in the day.

By the time, I arrived home, it was around 11pm. As I entered my house I could hear Mahid running about excitedly because his maternal grandparents, my in-laws, had just arrived from the United States for the Jalsa. He was particularly overjoyed at the fact that they had brought him boxes of his favourite chocolate '*Smarties*'.

Expanding horizons

Over the years, I have seen how the scope of the *Press & Media office*, in which I have been able to serve, has continued to increase and broaden.

The work conducted by the office when I joined was much more limited than it is today. This change has not been due to any skill of mine or of my team members, rather it has been entirely due to the guidance of Huzoor.

Huzoor has himself assigned various new tasks and responsibilities to the office and he has always encouraged us to increase our productivity.

During *Mulaqat* that week, Huzoor mentioned the *United States Jalsa Salana* to me, which had taken place the previous weekend. Huzoor asked me if I had received any report about the activities of the Jalsa.

Upon hearing my report, Huzoor said:

“One thing I have noticed is that your office still does not monitor Jamaat activities and events as well as it should. There is still a lot for your office to accomplish and work towards.”

Huzoor continued by saying:

“You should contact each Jamaat directly and also through Wakalat-e-Tabshir and request a calendar of each Jamaat’s annual activities. This should include their Jamaat programmes and also their auxiliary programmes. Ultimately, there should not be any official Jamaat

programme anywhere in the world that you and your office are not aware of. Whilst those events are taking place you should be receiving live reports about how they are progressing and also the feedback of such events. This will be of use to you both in your Press & Media Office and also for MTA News and it will also show the local Jamaat's that the Markaz (centre) is fully involved and interested in their affairs."

Huzoor said that it would not be possible for me and my office staff to manage this project on our own and so we should look for volunteers based in different countries who could assist in this.

Thereafter, Huzoor said:

"The scope of Jamaat work is such that it is not limited or finitely defined. Rather, you should always be looking to find new ways to expand and increase your output."

I was struck by Huzoor's guidance and his vision for our office, which was beyond anything I had considered in the past.

Personally speaking, I have felt the benefit of Huzoor's guidance time and time again during the past few years.

When I was first appointed to the *Press & Media Office*, I did not really understand my role and furthermore it was extremely intimidating dealing with Jamaats across the world and their senior members, most of whom were far older and far more experienced than me.

However, the very first instruction Huzoor gave to me was:

“If you have a problem or question then discuss it with me directly.”

Huzoor’s graciousness in this regard has been the means through which our office has functioned and through which I came to understand the work of our office and deal with others.

Emotions of Ahmadis

As every day passed by and the Jalsa drew closer, the rush and spiritual atmosphere around the *Fazl Mosque* continued to increase. Each day, the number of family Mulaqats also increased.

On a normal day in London, Huzoor will normally meet around 25 families in Mulaqat, however during the days of Jalsa, Huzoor was meeting 70 or 80 families daily and on certain days he met around 100 families.

I took the opportunity to meet with some of the people fortunate enough to have Mulaqat with Huzoor and to hear about their experiences.

I met *Saliha Malik sahiba, Sadr Lajna of USA*. Saliha sahiba, herself is a convert to Ahmadiyyat and on 8th August she met Huzoor with her daughter Rahana.

After meeting Huzoor, Saliha sahiba said:

“Whenever you meet Huzoor you feel uplifted and great contentment. Seeing the Khalifa is a source of spiritual rejuvenation and energises you. As Sadr Lajna, I have had the opportunity to meet regularly with Huzoor and to personally learn from him and the one thing he has taught me above all else is to have firm trust in Allah at all times, no matter the circumstances or issues.”

Another person I met was *Haseeb Ahmad (27)*, a *Waqf-e-Zindighi* from Rabwah who was serving in the English section of the *Fazl-e-Umar Foundation* in Rabwah. He was extremely emotional, having just met Huzoor for the first time in his life.

Haseeb said:

“The yearning I had in my heart for so long to meet my Khalifa has been fulfilled and I cannot adequately describe how I am feeling. I used to feel grief-stricken that I am far away from the person who I love more than anyone else, yet now he himself has called me here. In Mulaqat, I could not speak, yet Huzoor knew who I was and remarked ‘You are the person who writes to me a lot and who has presented MTA programmes whilst sitting on the stairs.’ The fact he knew me is indescribable.”

Haseeb also narrated an older memory. He said:

“I once met Huzoor (Khalifatul Masih V) before he became Khalifa in Rabwah. He left such a strong and noble impression on me that when

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) passed away I prayed that Allah would make Mirza Masroor Ahmad our new Khalifa. I was a child and I did not know if it was wrong to pray in this manner but this was what I prayed and when the election for the Fifth Khalifa was announced I felt immediate peace, comfort and joy.”

I met a lady called *Fauzia Mansoor* who was 58 and had come from Rabwah Pakistan. In her entire life she had never met any Khalifa until that day.

Speaking of her Mulaqat, which had taken place moments earlier, Fauzia sahiba said:

“I have waited 58 years to see the spiritual representative of Hazrat Masih-e-Maud (as) and finally that day has come. Before entering Huzoor’s office I was sure that my tongue would be tied and I would be unable to speak a word in his presence. However, Huzoor was so kind and loving that I felt at ease and Alhamdolillah I was able to request his prayers. In Huzoor’s office all you feel is peace and love.”

Fauzia sahiba continued:

“I am now looking forward to the Jalsa because I have seen on MTA how Hadeeqatul Mahdi is a farmland but somehow the Jamaat turns that jungle into a city for the Jalsa period! It has been my desire to see this sight for many years.”

'Terms and jargon'

During *Mulaqat* that week, there was news of a large passenger plane that had been forced into making a crash landing in Dubai. Whilst sitting in the *PS Office*, I read how the plane had made a '*belly landing*', which was an entirely new term for me.

Hence, when I presented the news to Huzoor during my *Mulaqat* that day, rather than repeating this term, I explained it in a long-winded fashion.

As I sought to explain what had happened, Huzoor looked at me and said:

"You mean they did a belly-landing?"

I laughed and said that I thought that Huzoor may not know this term and so I had wasted time trying to explain it.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

"In Pakistan, they taught us English in a way that we came to know a lot of 'terms' and 'jargon' quite well."

Hearing this I was reminded of how recently, Huzoor had used the term '*in-camera*' during an interview.

Having never heard this term, I thought I had misheard and Huzoor must have said said '*on-camera*'.

Later when Huzoor read through my notes he asked why I had written ‘on-camera’, when he meant ‘in-camera’, which was a legal term that had the opposite meaning of ‘on-camera’ and actually referred to a state of privacy and confidence.

Despite having studied law at university, I had never heard this term before and I mentioned this to Huzoor and so he took out his *iPad* and referenced the term on an online dictionary.

Of course, Huzoor was proven right as the definition for ‘in-camera’ noted that it was used widely in legal circles in particular.

Emotions of Ahmadis

Moments after I had met Huzoor, another session of family Mulaqats began and so I went and stood in the courtyard of Masjid Fazl, opposite to the exit from which people who had Mulaqat exited Huzoor’s office.

I met with an elderly husband and wife who had come from Abu Dhabi, *Naseer Khan sahib (63)* and his wife *Sayyed Khannum*.

Naseer Khan sahib told me that he had been facing a personal issue for some time and so in his Mulaqat he had sought Huzoor’s advice.

Speaking about this, Naseer sahib said:

“Despite being so busy, Huzoor listened carefully to what I had to say. Thereafter, Huzoor advised me how to handle this issue and I have to

say that his advice is filled with so much wisdom. I spent the past four months thinking and contemplating how to handle it but had not reached any firm conclusion and yet in a few seconds Huzoor has resolved everything. I feel as though this great weight has already been lifted from my shoulders."

His wife, Sayyed Khannum was extremely emotional after meeting Huzoor. She said:

"Those moments with my Khalifa were priceless. Huzoor's personality is radiant and filled with spiritual light. I often say to my husband that if I die then please tell Huzoor that I loved him very, very much."

As they left, Naseer sahib smiled and said:

"Apart from being our spiritual leader, Huzoor also has a very affectionate personality. When we stood to have a photo, I tried to quickly fasten my shirt-collar button but for some reason it did not fasten straight away. Upon seeing me struggle, Huzoor smiled and said: 'Leave it - even with the button undone you still look smart!'"

One lady I met was Tehmeena Fasi from Los Angeles East Jamaat, who had come to attend the Jalsa with her husband and young children.

Tehmeena sahiba was very emotional. She said:

"I was waiting anxiously and desperately for this day and in truth I did not know if it would ever come because I have been unwell and so I did

not know if I could travel. However, I wrote to Huzoor and with his prayers I am better and was able to travel and more importantly my children were able to meet him.”

As she described her desire for her children to have a direct link and bond with Khilafat, Tehmeena sahiba began to cry.

As she wiped tears from her eyes, she said:

“You people who live here near Huzoor have no idea how fortunate you are! You have no idea how lucky you are! Please do not ever take this blessing for granted. Your children see Huzoor daily and pray behind him and Huzoor knows their names – what greater blessing could you have? Here in London, I see how our Mosques are filled every day but it is not the same everywhere else. It is the greatest possible challenge to do the good Tarbiyyat of our children when you live so far from Khilafat.”

I met *Muhammad Noman Rana (32)* a young Missionary of the Jamaat who graduated a few years ago from *Jamia Ahmadiyya Canada* and was now posted in Mexico. He was with his wife *Talat Noman*.

Noman sahib told me about the challenges he and his wife had faced in Mexico. Of course there had initially been a language barrier but they had quite quickly learned Spanish and Noman sahib was now able to communicate well with the local community. There were also major cultural differences and other challenges that they had to face.

Speaking about his *Mulaqat* that day and also his experiences in Mexico, Noman sahib said:

“During Mulaqat, Huzoor most graciously said that I was doing a good job in Mexico, Alhamdolillah. However, alongside this, Huzoor also told me that it was necessary that I remained always humble and never permitted any arrogance or pride to enter my heart or mind.”

Noman sahib continued:

“Under Huzoor’s guidance, the Jamaat has started a very active Tabligh programme in Mexico. Initially, there was no Jamaat but now there are 150 Ahmadis and they are all local Mexicans. It is quite unique to have a Jamaat without a single Pakistani, except for the Missionaries. Some of our new Ahmadis from Mexico have travelled for the Jalsa and they are all excited and extremely nervous at the prospect of meeting Huzoor. The love of the Jamaat and Khilafat that they feel is quite incredible.”

I met a Nigerian Ahmadi convert, *Abdul Ghani Idris (64)* who told me that he had become Ahmadi in 1973 and thereafter had trained as a Jamaat Missionary and had been serving in this capacity for many years.

Abdul Ghani sahib told me how Ahmadiyyat had impacted him personally. He said:

“Through Ahmadiyyat I have seen my Creator and Who He is. Ahmadiyyat has introduced me to my Lord and has shown me that no

individual or nation has the right to monopolise God Almighty. This is the true Islam."

A childhood trip to 'Pakistan'

As I stood meeting people from different parts of the world, I saw a lady walk past who seemed familiar, although I was not quite sure who she was.

I had a feeling she was a relative of our family called *Mahum Ahmad* who I had known as *Mahmi baji*. I had not personally met her for well over 25 years but I remembered that when I was a small child she had visited our home in Hartlepool and spent quite a bit of time with us.

In my mind, I had a vague memory that she used to look after me and play with me quite a lot at that time. However, I did not wish to approach her in case it was a case of mistaken identity!

I thought if I went up to an Ahmadi lady and said to her that she used to play with me many years ago and it turned out to be someone else entirely it would be a grave disaster!

Thankfully, I saw *Amer Malik*, son of Major Mahmood sahib, nearby and his wife *Ayesha* and quietly I was able to confirm from Amer that it was Mahmi baji and that she now lived in Turkey with her family.

I went and met her and she also remembered that period where she stayed with us.

In fact she told me a story that I did not remember. She said:

“During those days Abid you were 5 or 6 years old and when I told you I was from Pakistan you told me that I should take you to Pakistan. So I put you in a wheelbarrow and pushed you to the other side of the garden and said ‘Here is Pakistan’. Upon that you looked at me and said ‘Pakistan is very boring, please take me home!’”

I laughed when I heard this story and it was nice to meet her. It reminded me briefly of that happy time in my childhood when I lived in Hartlepool with my parents, siblings and the dozens of Ahmadi converts who were like our extended family.

Emotions of Ahmadis

I met an Ahmadi from Rabwah, Pakistan, *Jamil Ahmadi Khan (54)* who was a worker in *Wakalat Uliya* and was attending the Jalsa as an official representative of the Jamaat. He told me of meeting Huzoor once in Rabwah before he was elected as Khalifatul Masih.

Jamil sahib said:

“I actually met Huzoor before he was elected Khalifa. I vividly remember that I once entered his office in Rabwah and the spirituality and peace I felt that day was completely unique. Back then, when I had no idea that Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad would one day be our Khalifa, I still felt as though I had met with a pure angel and servant of God Almighty.”

I met *Syed Aftab Ahmad* who had come from Qadian to attend the Jalsa. He was in-charge of the Jamaat's central library in Qadian.

Aftab sahib said:

"During Mulaqat, Huzoor gave me a perfume as a gift and I will treasure this gift and Huzoor's kindness forever. However, the greatest gift Huzoor has given me is truly eternal and that is his prayers. The prayers of Khalifa-Waqt are all that I need."

When I asked him how his Mulaqat had gone, he said:

"For me to even comment on my Mulaqat feels wrong because who am I to even comment about the spiritual representative of the Imam Mahdi? All I can say is Alhamdolillah."

As he said these words, Aftab sahib became very emotional and took out a tissue to wipe away his tears.

Still crying, Aftab said:

"For a long time my wife and I could not have children. I used to pray to Allah that may He bless us with progeny that is close to Khilafat and that if our destiny was to have children who were not attached to this blessed institution then I would prefer for us not have any child at all."

Aftab sahib continued:

“Due only to the prayers of Khalifa-Waqt we were later blessed with a son and a daughter and they are both members of the Waqf-e-Nau scheme and today I also have two grandchildren, Masha’Allah. All I desire for my progeny is to serve their faith. I do not need or desire anything else from them.”

A broken window & a word of wisdom

One afternoon that week, as I waited in the *PS Office* for Mulaqat, I received a phone call from my wife Mala.

She told me that a few minutes earlier she had heard a large bang in our lounge and so she rushed to the room to see what had happened and saw that a large window in our lounge had been smashed.

She had no idea how the window had broken until a few minutes later, a lady rang our doorbell and said she was a neighbour and that she wished to come in and explain about the window.

The lady entered our home with her teenage son and said:

“I am extremely sorry – my son was playing football and he kicked the ball towards your window by mistake and smashed your window.”

The lady added:

“We will pay for the damage – actually, I should say my son will pay for the damage – we will take the money from his pocket money.”

The teenage boy also apologised.

Anyway, as I entered Mulaqat a moment later I was appreciative of the fact that the mother and son had come to our home to apologise and grateful they had offered to pay for the damage. On the other side, I was a little annoyed and irritated at the inconvenience of it all.

With this incident fresh in my mind, I narrated the story to Huzoor.

As I began to tell this story, Huzoor looked up from his work and looked directly at me throughout. Huzoor waited for me to finish narrating the story before saying very firmly:

“You are not to take a single penny from the boy or his family!”

I have to admit I was a little taken aback by this and surprised. I was then left astounded and overcome with the beauty of what Huzoor said next.

Huzoor said:

“When you mentioned there had been a bang, my immediate thought was that perhaps Mahid had fallen down or had an accident and so you should be thankful to Allah that this was not the case.”

Huzoor continued:

“Secondly, you should tell the neighbour and her son that Islam teaches love for all and fulfilling the rights of others. It teaches to sacrifice your own rights for the benefit of others and it particularly emphasises the rights of neighbours. And so you should tell them that out of that love for your neighbours that Islam has taught you, it is impossible for you to take even a penny from them. You should tell them that you are not doing a favour upon them, rather this is their right as a neighbour.”

Huzoor further said:

“Inform your neighbour that this is what true Islam is – helping others and being compassionate and that it is not what you see or hear about in the media. Further, if she insists on paying something then tell her to donate that money to charity instead so that it is used for the benefit of someone in need.”

Listening to these words of Huzoor, I was amazed and at the same time extremely emotional.

It occurred to me, how most of us look at our own rights and are concerned about our own comfort and ease, yet Khalifa-Waqt is he who always keeps Islam’s true teachings and concepts at the forefront of his mind.

Even after working under the guidance of Huzoor for a number of years, still each day Huzoor says something that surprises me and fills my heart with happiness and shines a light on the true teachings of Islam.

Mala texted me the number of the lady and so as soon as I left Huzoor's office, I called her and told her that there was no need for her or her son to worry about paying for our window.

The joy, emotion and sheer shock in her voice was something I will never forget. She said:

"I am overwhelmed by your kindness. I can't believe how generous you are and how kind. I do not know how to express my gratitude."

She also hinted that, though she intended for her son to pay for the window, it would have been quite difficult for them financially to do so.

I told her that there was no need to be grateful to me as I was just following what the Quran and Holy Prophet of Islam (*peace be upon him*) had taught us. Upon hearing this, she herself said that the Islam that I was describing was completely different to what the media portrayed.

Later, that day I informed Huzoor of the lady's reaction.

Upon hearing it, Huzoor said:

"This is how you open the doors to preaching."

It was a great lesson for me. Firstly, that we should always look to the positive and not the negative. Hence, Huzoor's first reaction upon hearing this story was that I should be thankful that my child had not been injured and not concerned about some broken glass.

Secondly, it taught that we should always try to apply Islam's teachings in our everyday lives and not just speak about them.

Emotions of Ahmadis

One evening that week, I met *Syed Naseer-ud-Din (63)* who had come to attend the Jalsa as an official representative of the Qadian Jamaat. In Qadian he was currently serving as *Qaid Amoomi, in Majlis Ansarullah*. He was accompanied by his wife.

Speaking about their Mulaqat with Huzoor, Naseer-ud-Din sahib said:

"In 2008, Huzoor was meant to come to Qadian but after visiting South India, Huzoor cut short his trip following the Mumbai attacks and ever since I felt devastation and grief that Huzoor had not been able to come to Qadian. However today I have met him and seen him and the feelings of peace and joy are indescribable. You see the tears that are falling from my eyes? These tears are symbols of that blessing that Allah has given us with the institution of Khilafat. No other person can love us like our Khalifa does."

As he said these words, Naseer sahib broke down completely and his wife who was stood at his side turned up away to cover her own tears. It was a scene that I would surely never forget – two elderly people crying like infant children due to their love of Khilafat.

In truth, I do not think I have ever in my life seen elderly people weep as they wept that day.

I also met an Ahmadi called *Naseem ul-Ghani Sardar (46)* from Lahore. After meeting Huzoor he said:

“We Ahmadi Muslims are so fortunate that Allah the Almighty has granted us the gift of Khilafat. I personally have found the best way to stay close to Huzoor is to listen to his Friday Sermon every week. I often have a question in my heart and when I listen to the sermon it is answered and it seems as though Huzoor wrote his sermon just for me. He is the Khalifa for everyone but he is also the Khalifa just for me.”

Thousands of letters

During those days working in the *PS Office*, one thing that shocked me was the sheer volume of letters and papers in the office.

Each day, I literally saw thousands of personal letters or official reports on the desks of the various members of staff in the office. Invariably, almost every letter or report had Huzoor’s signature on it, indicating that he had read each one.

Further, many of them had notes handwritten by Huzoor on them, giving instructions or offering prayers and guidance.

Just looking at the scale was unbelievable. I could not comprehend how Huzoor would have the time to go through so much mail and correspondence, considering all his other daily responsibilities.

Meetings with relatives

In London, on certain days of most weeks, Huzoor most graciously meets members of his family or relatives in the evenings after *Isha*. It is a great blessing and privilege for the family members that Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (Huzoor's respected wife) spare their precious time and invite them into their home.

With the *Grace of Allah*, Mala and I have also had this great privilege over the years. Each week, visiting Huzoor is the highlight of our week and it is a source of untold blessings that our children are able to see Huzoor and to become personally attached to him.

Our son Mahid has become extremely familiar with this routine and throughout the week he asks me when we will next go to "*Huzoor's house*".

Generally, in such Mulaqats, Huzoor is quite relaxed. He might ask those visiting how they are or might tell a joke or narrate an old story or incident.

During the days of Jalsa, the number of Huzoor's relatives present in London is far greater than normal and this year particularly the number attending Jalsa was extremely high.

Thus every night after *Isha*, I saw various members of the family of the Promised Messiah (as), including some very elderly members, at the Mosque. A few minutes after *Isha*, they would have the blessed opportunity to sit in the presence of Huzoor for a few minutes.

As the space is limited, local London based people like myself, did not go up to Huzoor's flat during those days. However, my father-in-law and mother-in-law had travelled from the US and so on some days they would visit Huzoor.

I would wait until their Mulaqat was completed and then I would drive them back to our home and listen as they told me how Huzoor was that evening and what he had said.

Emotions of Ahmadis

One evening that week, I met with *Karim-ud-din Shams (44)*, a Pakistani Missionary of the Jamaat posted in Tanzania moments after he had met Huzoor in Mulaqat.

I was interested to hear if living in Africa was difficult and the challenges that he and his family had faced.

In response to my question, Karim sahib said:

"I have been serving the Jamaat in Tanzania since 2003 and it has not been difficult for me because when you do Waqf and devote your life then you know that you can be sent anywhere in the world by Khalifa-Waqt. You also know that due to his prayers and the blessings of Waqf, Allah will always be with you. When Huzoor sends us to far-away places he does not send us empty handed, rather he sends us with his prayers and those prayers are our lifeline."

I also met another Missionary posted in Tanzania, *Bahsarat Butt (35)* who said:

“I was sent to Tanzania eight years ago and the trick is not to think about the fact that you are thousands of miles from your childhood home. If you think about your old life and old friends, then being sent to Tanzania will undoubtedly be a difficult transition. However, if you think that I have been sent by Khalifatul Masih, who is the spiritual leader for Ahmadi worldwide, and that he has sent me as his ambassador then you feel at home anywhere in the world.”

Narrating the love of Khilafat amongst the African people that he had himself witnessed, Basharat sahib said:

“I have lived amongst the African people for many years now and I have seen with my own eyes that the African people have a great and profound love for Khilafat.”

Basharat sahib continued:

“For example, our Amir sahib once said in a meeting that though he desired to invite Huzoor to Tanzania, he did not think that our Jamaat was ready to host Huzoor properly. Upon hearing this, an 80 year old African Ahmadi stood up and said very emotionally ‘You have done a great cruelty to us by not inviting our Khalifa because you think we are not ready. Do you not know that our greatest development and progress will only happen when our Khalifa is with us and not when he is thousands of miles away and you are waiting for us to get ready!’”

Meeting with Indian Swami

On 10 August 2016, Huzoor held a meeting with an Indian spiritual leader, *Swami Sarvalokananda* from the *Ramakrishna Order*, whose headquarters are based in Calcutta and a few of his UK-based followers.

I did not know what the role of a *Swami* was but through the meeting and through later research, I came to know that a *Swami* was a Hindu religious leader and teacher and very well respected and looked up to amongst Hindus.

The meeting took place in the conservatory that is attached to Huzoor's own office. Also present at the meeting was Fateh Dahri sahib, *Wakil Tamil-o-Tanfidh* who had brought the guest to meet Huzoor.

The *Swami* informed Huzoor that his organisation had 200 centres across the world and that he personally had a very large following in India.

Upon hearing this, Huzoor said:

“No matter how many followers you have, the key is that you must guide your people towards peace and inter-faith tolerance and dialogue. You should tell them that religion is a matter of the heart and free choice and that people of all faiths and beliefs should respect one another and prioritise human values. We should all remember that we are creation of that God, who is the Creator and Lord of all the worlds.”

One of the other guest's present was from *Leicester* and upon hearing this, Huzoor mentioned that he had travelled to Leicester in February to inaugurate the *Baitul Ikram Mosque*.

The guest asked where in Leicester the Mosque was and so Huzoor turned to me and asked if I knew. Unfortunately, I did not but as the conversation continued, I quickly *Googled* the Mosque address and when the next break in conversation occurred I informed Huzoor of the location and he invited the guest to visit the Leicester Mosque.

Thereafter, the *Swami* asked Huzoor further details about our Jamaat. In response, Huzoor said:

"We Ahmadi Muslims are persecuted in certain countries and some of our members are brutally killed but we respond only with peace. We never respond with violence, take revenge or take to the streets."

Huzoor continued:

"It is due to our commitment to peace and harmony that others are sympathetic towards us. Other groups and people have taken up the issue of the persecution of Ahmadis on our behalf. However, most importantly when we stay silent, we have full conviction that Allah the Almighty speaks on our behalf and defends us and He always will, Insha'Allah."

Liberals or orthodox?

The Swami informed Huzoor that he had been subject to some death threats in Bangladesh from extremist Muslims.

Huzoor responded by saying that this was completely against Islam's teachings and it was the duty of Muslims to protect the people of other beliefs and their religious leaders.

Upon this, the *Swami* said:

"I have heard and now seen for myself that you are 'liberals' and are not fanatics."

Hearing this, Huzoor responded by saying:

"We are not liberal - actually we are orthodox Muslims because we follow the true teachings of Islam. Our teachings and our beliefs are the Quran."

What is a *kafir*?

A Hindu lady who was amongst the delegation seemed quite wary of Islam's teachings.

She said that she had heard Islam taught that *kafirs* must be killed or attacked.

In response, Huzoor said:

“All that is meant by ‘kafir’ in Islamic terminology is someone who does not accept the teachings of Islam. Yet this term does not give any Muslim the licence to attack or persecute any other person, rather all non-Muslims are granted full rights and protection by Islam.”

Huzoor continued:

“The Promised Messiah (as) even said that if it would lead to peace and harmony then he was prepared to instruct his followers to forgo eating beef if eating such meat hurt the sentiments of Hindus, for whom the cow is considered sacred.”

Upon hearing this, the lady responded with just one word:

“Wow!”

Huzoor then presented the Swami and other guests copies of the latest edition of his book, *“World Crisis: Pathway to Peace”*.

The lady who had just asked about the status of *kafirs* asked Huzoor if he would sign her book.

Following this the *Swami* and other guests also asked Huzoor to sign their copies.

Seeing this, Huzoor looked at the lady and smiled before saying:

“It seems you are the lead because only after you asked for it to be signed did the men also request this!”

Huzoor signed the first couple of copies with his own pen, which he kept with him in the front pocket on his *achkan* coat.

However, as the first few pages of the book were ‘glossy’ paper, the ink from Huzoor’s pen kept running and smudging.

At first, Huzoor took a tissue and wiped away the excess ink, upon which the lady said:

“Your Holiness, I consider even this ink that has smudged to be holy as it has come from your hand.”

With this comment, you could see the profound effect seeing Huzoor had on her and through their demeanour a similar effect was also visible on the Swami and other guests.

Anyway, to prevent the ink running on the other copies he was signing, Huzoor asked me if I had a pen and so I handed him the disposable pen that I had in my pocket. Huzoor signed the rest of the copies with that.

A few moments with Huzoor

After the meeting concluded and the guests left Huzoor's office, Huzoor indicated to me to remain in the office. I then presented my daily report to Huzoor.

I also asked Huzoor about the Jalsa inspection a few days earlier. I had been told by someone that Huzoor had not eaten the fish that had been served to him and I was curious if there had been a particular reason, as normally Huzoor enjoys seafood.

In response to my question, Huzoor said:

“Yes at the inspection they served fish at our table but I did not take it. I told them that this is a dinner of the langhar khana and I will eat the same langhar food that everyone else is eating. The inspection is not the time for such food.”

Huzoor's words were filled with both humility, simplicity and wisdom. On the one hand it showed Huzoor's love for the Ahmadi volunteers and workers, wherein he did not wish to eat anything extra to what they were being served.

Furthermore, I also thought about how Huzoor had stated that it was not the time for such food. I felt that Huzoor meant the period before Jalsa should be spent with particular simplicity.

I also informed Huzoor about a family I had just met outside the Fazl Mosque. I had gone to my car to collect something when suddenly another car drove up and parked directly behind mine.

Three people came out and approached me, an Ahmadi lady and her son and daughter, both of whom appeared to be in their early-20s.

At first, I was a little startled as I did not recognise them but they then introduced themselves and told me that they read the diaries I had written about Huzoor's tours.

The daughter then said:

"Abid sahib, I have one request and that is that you write a diary about the UK Jalsa or Huzoor's life in the UK."

I told Huzoor that I had informed her that on his instruction I was planning to do just that this year.

I also informed Huzoor about some of the Ahmadiis I had met in the past few days.

I mentioned a French-Algerian husband and wife who were converts to Ahmadiyyat and who had said they wished they had more time with Huzoor in Mulaqat and that it had not been enough time to satisfy their hearts.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“The couple you are referring to live in France and so they can come and meet me any time of the year as France is very near. At this time, it is important that I give the most time to those who come from far away countries and who do not have the opportunity to travel to London often.”

Emotions of Ahmadis

Later that day, I met an Ahmadi called *Chaudhry Munawar Ahmad Gill* (60) from Germany who was very emotional.

Wiping away tears from his eyes, Munawar sahib said:

“I am forever ready to give my life for the sake of Khilafat. You can open up my heart and all you will see that is my only desire. Serving the mission of the Promised Messiah (as) is the only thing that matters.”

I met an Ahmadi called *Hafeez-ur-Rehman* (49) from the United States, who said:

“One thing I have seen is that Huzoor has a keen interest in people and especially in the lives of us Ahmadis. He automatically knows what is in our hearts and what is in our minds. He is so busy but still he has a command and understanding of the personal issues that each and every Ahmadi is facing. Our Khalifa is filled with humility and despite having such a high status, he is also extremely down to earth.”

I met a lady called *Rashida Bashir* from Pakistan, who told me of a past experience.

Rashida sahiba said:

“I once met Huzoor in Karachi in 2003. When I met him, I did not know him at all but I felt something special in my heart when I saw him. I felt peace and a pure spirit from him. A month later, he was elected as Khalifatul Masih and now when you meet him you feel as though there is spiritual light all around him.”

I also met a young Ahmadi lady called *Adeela Javaid* who had just met Huzoor with her husband. As she left Huzoor’s office she was extremely emotional and throughout our conversation she remained so.

Adeela sahiba said:

“At this moment, I am the happiest person in the world. Our Huzoor is so kind. We ask him and he gives. You can see that I am crying but these are tears of joy because I am the most fortunate and lucky person on this entire earth. Those two minutes in Huzoor’s office have changed my life and transformed me into a new Ahmadi.”

She continued:

“I am a Waqf-e-Nau and during our Mulaqat, Huzoor asked me if I was serving the Jamaat in any capacity. Huzoor’s question was extremely emotional because it showed me how much he cares for us. Huzoor has

no need of my services but out of his love he wants me to fully benefit from the blessing of being part of this scheme.”

Packing for Jalsa

On 11 August, the day before Jalsa, I met Huzoor in his office in the afternoon. When I entered, Huzoor was packing with his own hands a small wheeler suitcase.

In the case, Huzoor was placing books of the Promised Messiah (as) and also his personal notes for his forthcoming Jalsa addresses. This is a scene, I have seen in previous years as well and also sometimes before Huzoor departs for a tour abroad.

I always wish I could assist Huzoor and that he did not have to do the packing himself. However, I also know that if I offered to help it would probably slow Huzoor down as I would need direction on where everything should go.

As he packed the books, Huzoor smiled and said:

“Mein aaj kal apna ilm barhaara hoon” –

Meaning:

“These days I am increasing my own knowledge”.

Huzoor's words displayed again his immense humility. The knowledge of Khalifatul Masih is so vast and he is guided by Allah the Almighty and yet still Huzoor takes the time to study and increase his own knowledge.

Personally, when I heard this comment I felt ashamed that I do not read and study anywhere near as much as I should.

Huzoor's media guidance

I also took the opportunity to seek Huzoor's guidance regarding our media work at Jalsa. An Indian journalist had accepted our invitation and sought to do a discussion programme with a group of Ahmadi ladies at the Jalsa.

In response, Huzoor said:

"She can record the programme as long as she does not ask about political issues or turn the broadcast into a political debate."

This was an example of how Huzoor gives instructions to the *Press & Media office* and how he guides us. Given the particular sensitivities of India-Pakistan relations and the fact that so many lies are perpetuated about the Jamaat by our opponents, this guidance was extremely important and made it clear to us as a team where we would need to step in and draw a line.

Based on Huzoor's guidance, we informed the journalist of the fact that we would not get involved in a political debate and also the members of Lajna who were to partake. *Alhamdulillah*, the discussion that took place on Friday afternoon during the break, went extremely well.

In anticipation of Jalsa, our central media team sends out media invites and deals with media guests at Jalsa. Similarly, the local UK *Umur-e-Kharija* team also has a media team who invite journalists.

Since this 'twin-system' has been in place for the past few years, there have been members of my team and also of the UK team who have been concerned that it could lead to potential confusion or overlapping.

The concern raised is that a journalist or media organisation could be invited twice or could be unsure of whom to deal with. To mitigate this risk, we have followed a principle that where one team establishes contact with a journalist, then the other team takes a step back and focuses on other contacts.

I remember when I first mentioned this issue to Huzoor a couple of years ago, he responded by saying:

“What is the worst that can happen? That the journalist will receive two invitations? At least this way there is more chance they will be contacted and do not worry!”

I have always remembered Huzoor's guidance and this point Huzoor made has proven itself true.

No journalist has ever refused our invitation because of the fact that they happened to receive 'two invitations' but the fact that there are two teams means that there is greater manpower and so we have been able to

contact a broader range of people. *Alhamdulillah* over the past couple of years the media coverage at Jalsa has improved each year.

Nonetheless, in the run-up to Jalsa this year, there were a few contacts our central team had made, which the UK team had also contacted and vice versa.

I tried to stick to the principle that whoever had sent out the first invitation for Jalsa Salana and made contact would remain the point of contact for each journalist.

However, in the days preceding Jalsa, I did feel that there may be an element of resentment or frustration amongst members of the UK team about the fact that there were a couple of high ranking journalists who our team were dealing with, whom they had also subsequently made contact with.

I did not wish for any ill-feeling and so that evening, I mentioned it to Huzoor and requested his prayers that everything went smoothly at Jalsa.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“If you are dealing with any journalist who the UK Jamaat team also knows then they can send their team representative and accompany your team member and the journalist. Similarly, if there is any journalist they are dealing with that your team had contact with then you can send a representative of your team to accompany them.”

I was extremely relieved and glad to hear this advice as this issue had been bearing heavy on my heart during the past couple of days.

After Mulaqat, I informed Fareed Ahmad sahib, *National Secretary Umur-e-Kharija UK*, and he immediately expressed his gratitude and delight at Huzoor's guidance.

Alhamdolillah with Huzoor's guidance and prayers the co-ordination between the teams during Jalsa proved to be extremely smooth.

Emotions of Ahmadis

Despite the fact that the Jalsa Salana was commencing the following day and despite the fact that later that evening he was travelling to Hadeeqatul Mahdi, that evening Huzoor held a full session of family Mulaqats at the Fazl Mosque.

That afternoon, one person I met was *Mirza Ramzan Sharif (48)* who had travelled with his wife from Australia.

I knew Ramzan sahib well, having worked closely with him during Huzoor's tour of Australia in 2013, where he serves as the *National Secretary Umoor-e-Kharija*.

I was amazed to hear the story of how his wife had accompanied him on the 28-hour journey to London. She had suffered with gall stones and had been admitted for surgery the night before they travelled to London for the Jalsa.

Recounting her story, Ramzan Sahib's wife said:

"I did not tell my doctors that I planned to travel to London because if they knew my intentions then they may have tried to stop me and not discharged me. Anyway, the night before we travelled I had surgery and the next morning I woke up at 6am and told the nurses that I need to be discharged. Thankfully, everything seemed in order and so the doctors discharged me much quicker than is normal and just in time so that I could make the flight."

She continued:

"The journey was a little difficult and I do feel tired but otherwise I am ok. In fact, I am excited and delighted that I am having this blessed opportunity to be near my Khalifa and to attend the international Jalsa Salana."

I also met Yusuf Seager (32) from Calgary, who had travelled to attend the Jalsa with his wife Maryam Seager. Yusuf had converted to Ahmadiyyat seven years previously.

After meeting Huzoor he said:

"Whenever I see Huzoor it reminds you how fortunate I am to have found this blessing of Khilafat. It is truly a spiritual treasure that protects us. Before becoming Ahmadi, I had some doubts and kept going back and forth before accepting Ahmadiyyat. I look back to that period

now and wish I could tell that confused young person to forget his doubts so that I could have joined the Jamaat even earlier.”

Balance between serving Jamaat and family life

That day I met a young Ahmadi man, *Saud Iqbal (30)* who had travelled from the United States to attend the Jalsa. He told me he had a toddler son, who he considered to be a little ‘*sharaarti*’ (naughty). During his Mulaqat he had mentioned this to Huzoor.

Huzoor had responded by saying:

“Do not worry. If your child asks for something then you can either fulfil his wish or if you decide that it is not appropriate then try to divert his attention so that he will himself forget. In this way, the habit of insisting for things will Insha’Allah die away.”

Saud also told me that he had asked Huzoor how to balance spending time with his family and serving the Jamaat.

In response, Huzoor said:

“Spend one weekend each month exclusively with your family and do Jamaat work and service on the other three weekends.”

Interestingly, a few days later, I met an African-American Ahmadi Khadim called *Junaid Latif*, who had also come to attend the UK. By chance, he had also asked Huzoor how to balance family life with Jamaat life.

In response, Huzoor had said to him:

“You should spend three weekends a month with your family and spend one weekend serving the Jamaat. The Tarbiyyat of your children is actually your Jamaat work.”

I was amazed when I heard this. It showed me, how Huzoor takes the personal conditions and backgrounds of people into account when making any decision.

It shows how Huzoor has a personal understanding of the lives and difficulties faced by each and every Ahmadi.

In the case of Saud, he was of Pakistani descent and all his relatives and family members were Ahmadis. Thus, he faced no obvious difficulties or anxieties that prevented him from serving the Jamaat very regularly.

However, Junaid’s case was different. Although his late mother, his father and his siblings were extremely devoted Ahmadis, there were members of his family and some of his in-laws who were not Ahmadis or who were not close to the Jamaat.

In such an environment there was a far greater risk that his young children could be negatively affected or could move away from the Jamaat.

Hence, Huzoor gave him the opposite advice to what he had given to Saud and had made it clear to Junaid that doing the good moral training of his children ought to be his focus and target.

Huzoor's guidance to Amir sahib UK

During those days I also took the opportunity to speak to *Rafiq Hayat sahib, Amir Jamaat UK*. Since the beginning of Huzoor's Khilafat, he has had the privilege of serving as *Amir* and had seen how the Jamaat had progressed under the blessed leadership and guidance of Khalifatul Masih.

Speaking about some of the blessings of *Khilafat* he had personally experienced in relation to the Jalsa Salana, Amir sahib said:

"After 2004 we had to find a new venue for our Jalsa Salana because Islamabad had become too small to fulfil our requirements and so for one year we found a temporary home at an army site in Rushmoor where we held the Jalsa in 2005."

Amir Sahib continued:

"During those days we were also offered the farm in Alton that has now become our home. I requested Huzoor to come and view the farm and most graciously he accepted. With the grace of Allah, I was able to accompany Huzoor in a 4x4 vehicle and show him the full 208-acre site. At the end, I asked Huzoor if he liked it and he said that he did, however he also instructed that I did not mention this to any of the other Amila members. Rather, they should visit the site themselves and then we should hold an Amila meeting and a vote. We followed Huzoor's advice and every single Amila member voted in favour of the purchase. Huzoor then announced the acquisition of the land in his final address at the

2005 address in Rushmoor and later Huzoor named the site as 'Hadeeqatul Mahdi' (Garden of the Mahdi)."

Amir sahib also mentioned how there was no suitable infrastructure at Rushmoor, in terms of water supply, sewage, accommodation, kitchen and other necessary facilities but Huzoor had still instructed Amir sahib to hold the Jalsa there in 2005. Amir sahib said he understood the true benefit and wisdom of this later.

Amir sahib said:

"By holding the Jalsa at Rushmoor, we were much more ready and well prepared for the issues that we would face at our new home in Hadeeqatul Mahdi. The experience and knowledge we had gained in that one year was all extremely helpful as we moved to our new permanent home in 2006. That is the far-sightedness of Khilafat."

Amir sahib also mentioned how Huzoor has the ability to calm others around him when they are facing difficulties or problems.

Describing an incident from the 2015 UK Jalsa Salana, Amir sahib said:

"Last year, there was a problem with our water supply that resulted in a slight contamination. We were all extremely worried and anxious about this and so after Fajr prayer I mentioned it to Huzoor and requested his prayers. Upon learning of it, Huzoor said that we should not worry and that in Pakistan such issues were common. He advised us

to take certain steps and thereafter the water authorities also arrived and ensured everything was in order.”

Amir sahib continued:

“Huzoor further instructed us how to store our equipment in future so that such an issue did not arise again. Of course we have followed Huzoor’s advice and accordingly this year there has been no issue whatsoever and everything is clear.”

Departure for Hadeeqatul Mahdi

Later that evening, on 11 August 2016 and following the conclusion of family Mulaqats, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor’s respected wife*) came out of their residence ready to travel to *Hadeeqatul Mahdi*. Before departing, Huzoor personally checked the luggage in the boot to ensure that everything was in order.

Many Ahmadis had gathered to wave Huzoor off and I also stood to the side of the gate and we all offered a silent prayer led by Huzoor.

Thereafter, Huzoor left *Masjid Fazl* and travelled to *Hadeeqatul Mahdi*, where he and thousands of Ahmadi Muslims, would reside for the next three days. The spirituality and blessings of the coming days could never be forgotten.

End of Part 1

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