

UK JALSA SALANA 2016

PART 2

A personal account

By Abid Khan

Introduction to Part 2

I wrote part 1 of my personal account of the UK Jalsa Salana 2016 in late September following Huzoor's tour of Germany earlier that month. My aim was to complete the subsequent parts of the UK diary before Huzoor departed for his tour of Canada or at the very least during his tour of Canada. Unfortunately, I was not able to keep to either of these targets.

Part 1 of the UK Jalsa diary ended on the evening of Thursday, 11 August, the night before Jalsa Salana UK begun. This part will include the days of Jalsa Salana and the day after Jalsa.

Insha'Allah part 3 will conclude this series with narrations from the week after Jalsa UK.

Commute to Jalsa Salana

It was 12 August 2016 and, after months of preparation, the first day of Jalsa Salana UK had finally arrived.

During the days of Jalsa, I would continue to commute from my home in Epsom along with my wife Mala and the children.

For our *Press & Media* team Friday was set to be extremely busy as we had several media organisations and journalists who had confirmed attendance.

The first, was a lady from *The Guardian* who was due to arrive around 10am. I wanted to meet her and some of the guests personally and so we planned to leave at 7.45am.

My house is about a 50minute drive from *Hadeeqatul Mahdi* and so I thought that this would enable us to arrive in good time. However, unfortunately, we ended up leaving slightly later than planned.

Normally, if we are ever late, it is due to some issue with the children. However, on that day Mahid and Moshahid were both ready on time and so they were not the cause of the delay and nor was my wife Mala. Rather, the culprit was me!

Just as we were about to leave, I realised that I had misplaced my mobile phone and so we all searched our home looking for it.

Finally, just as I was about to give up, I found it hidden under a piece of paper on a chest of drawers!

With my phone safely in my pocket, we left our home at 8.15am and I felt a mixture of excitement, happiness and nerves as we drove to the Jalsa.

Mahid was particularly excited. For weeks before, we had been telling him about Jalsa and each day his anticipation levels had increased to the point that he would repeat the word 'Jalsa' endlessly and re-confirm with us if he was going to attend.

Meeting the media

Anyway, with the *Grace of Allah*, we arrived in good time and I made my way down to our *Press & Media* office where we waited in anticipation for the journalists to arrive.

Getting media to *Hadeeqatul Mahdi* can be a challenge as it is far from central London, where most news agencies have their offices. Hence our experience is that even when media confirm attendance, sometimes they still pull out at the last minute.

However, *Alhamdulillah*, that day everyone we hoped would come, did come, and both our *Markazi* team and the UK Jamaat team were kept busy all day looking after a stream of journalists. In fact, one of my team members later said to me that we were working at absolute full capacity and that if even one more journalist had come then we would have been short-staffed.

The Al-Qalam Project

The *Guardian* journalist, Harriet Sherwood, the newspaper's *Religious Affairs* correspondent, was particularly interested to see the *Al-Qalam Project* being run by the *Review of Religions*.

Thus, we took her to the exhibition and introduced her to both Amer Safir, *Chief Editor of the Review of Religions* and also Razwan Baig sahib who had initially started the *Al-Qalam* project out of personal interest. The aim of *Al-Qalam* was to handwrite the entire Holy Quran, wherein each verse was written by a different individual.

As the journalist looked around the exhibition, Razwan sahib told me of how Huzoor was personally supporting this project.

Razwan sahib said:

“Recently, I had a Mulaqat with Huzoor and he liked the concept of the Al-Qalam project and expressed his support for it.”

Razwan sahib said he had asked Huzoor if he would be willing to contribute to the project by handwriting a verse of the Quran himself.

After a few seconds deliberation, Huzoor replied by saying:

“Yes, Insha’Allah I will take part in this project at a later date and the verse I will write will be Surah Fatiha.”

Thus, whenever this project is completed the very first chapter of the Quran will be handwritten by Huzoor, *Insha’Allah*.

Friday Sermon

The Jalsa Salana was to commence at 1pm with Huzoor’s Friday Sermon and so at exactly 1pm Huzoor emerged from his residence at *Hadeeqatul Mahdi* wearing a dark-olive coloured *achkan* coat.

Though the residence was on site at Hadeeqatul Mahdi, it was located at a distance from the main *Jalsa Gah*, and so Huzoor travelled to and from the *Jalsa Gah* by car.

I was seated in a car alongside the *Additional Wakil-ul-Maal*, Mubarak Zafar sahib and, given that I had spent many hours in car journeys with him abroad, it suddenly felt for those few minutes as though we were again on a tour abroad with Huzoor.

During his sermon, Huzoor said the participants of the Jalsa Salana should spend the three days focused solely on spiritual matters and increasing their religious knowledge.



Huzoor also spoke about the need for patience and tolerance during Jalsa. He said that whilst it was the duty of the organisers to make the Jalsa as comfortable as possible, those who attended ought to be willing to tolerate shortcomings.

Huzoor gave the example of Jalsas held in Qadian and Rabwah, where the temperature becomes extremely cold in the winter months. Huzoor said Ahmadis willingly braved the cold for the sake of attaining Allah's pleasure.

Huzoor said that some Ahmadis continued to display such a spirit. For example, despite the cold nights some people stayed on-site at *Hadeeqatul Mahdi* with their young children, sleeping in tents, so they could benefit fully

from the spiritual nature of Jalsa. When asked if it would not be better for them to stay somewhere else, they replied by saying that they were physically strong and wished to make their children physically strong as well and their only ambition was to fully partake in Jalsa.

Huzoor's comment about Jalsa attendance

Following the conclusion of the *Friday Sermon*, Huzoor returned to his residence.

As Huzoor exited his car, he spoke briefly to Amir sahib UK. Amir sahib informed Huzoor that already the attendance of *Jalsa Salana* seemed to be significantly higher than in previous years and he expected that it will reach 40,000.

Upon hearing this, Huzoor smiled and said:

"Let's see."

When Huzoor responded in this cautious way, I was sure in my mind that the attendance would not reach 40,000. This comment followed-on from an earlier comment made by Huzoor to me some days earlier when he had instructed us to not write that 40,000 would attend the Jalsa Salana in our official Press Release.

In the end, Huzoor was right the attendance did not reach 40,000, though with the *Grace of Allah*, it was significantly higher than last year reaching over 38,000.

The Channel 4 issue

As Huzoor was about to enter his residence, I deliberated about whether to approach him. I had had something on my mind for the past couple of hours that I was concerned about.

The UK's national television channel, *Channel 4*, had sent their news team to cover the Jalsa and shortly after they arrived, I received a message from a member of my team that the *Channel 4* journalist had started to make a big issue of the fact that the *Jalsa* was segregated, in terms of there being a separate men's side and ladies side.

My team was quite concerned that rather than writing a report about the Jalsa, the journalist would broadcast an anti-Islam report about 'segregation' and try to portray the *Jamaat* in a negative light.

I told Adam Walker from my team to introduce the journalists to some of our Ahmadi ladies so that they could explain first-hand that the concept of segregation in Islam and show that it was not forced upon them.

Nonetheless, throughout *Jumma* I was worried about this issue. The media often follows the media and so there was a thought in the back of my mind that if *Channel 4* did a piece about the segregation issue, then all the other media outlets who had come to the Jalsa, might focus on this one issue only.

During Jalsa, Huzoor is so extremely busy that I never wish to burden him with any matter and so I wait until after Jalsa concludes to present most matters to him.

However, on this occasion, more than anything I desired Huzoor's prayers that the issue with *Channel 4* did not flare up. I also thought that I should inform Huzoor in advance to seek his instructions and guidance on how to handle it.

Hence, when Huzoor reached the door of his residence, I approached him and said '*salam*'. Upon hearing me, Huzoor turned back and looked at me. Feeling somewhat nervous, I informed Huzoor of the situation.

Upon hearing about the issue, Huzoor said:

"Our Ahmadi women should meet the journalists directly and explain to them that being segregated is their choice and has not been forced upon them and that they consider this to be their means of freedom and independence."

Huzoor continued with words so inspirational and powerful that I can never forget.

Huzoor said:

"There is no need to worry. The journalists can broadcast whatever they want because no journalist or media outlet has ever caused harm to our Jamaat in the past and never will in the future! No media outlet has ever stopped our progress and never will! If they write something negative then we will not be upset or fearful, rather we will be happy and delighted that the true message of Islam is reaching far and wide!"

Literally, as I heard Huzoor's words the stress I had felt for the past couple of hours completely drain away in an instant. We often talk about the *Quranic* promise regarding *Khilafat* that it will transform a state of fear into a state of peace. I have personally witnessed the practical manifestation of this time after time.

I thanked Huzoor for his reassurance and then raced back to the *main Jalsa Gah* area so I could share Huzoor's guidance with my team. All of them received Huzoor's guidance with a mixture of joy, relief and awe. Truly, Huzoor's faith in Allah was an example to us all.

Broadcast of Channel 4 Report

Later that evening, *Channel 4* did broadcast a report on its national news about the Jalsa. The report lasted about 3 minutes and the majority was about the Jalsa itself and very positive.

However, the final 40 seconds focused upon the segregation issue and the female journalist made a point of the fact that her male cameraman was not allowed on the women's side at *Jalsa*.

She also interviewed *Ayesha Malik*, a Lajna member, who has taken part in various interviews in the past. With the *Grace of Allah*, Ayesha speaks well and on this occasion, she spoke particularly well.

Rather than getting angry or defensive, she smiled and responded to a question hinting at the fact that the segregation was a means of 'oppression', by saying that having their own independent set-up was the choice of the

ladies and their sense of “*empowerment and freedom*”. *Alhamdolillah*, she defended Islam’s teachings very eloquently and effectively.

Huzoor’s advice to Lajna about defending Islam

It so happened that Huzoor spoke about the role of women in Islam during his address to *Lajna Imaillah* the next day and he actually referred to this incident.

During his address, Huzoor mentioned that I had approached him the previous day and had been nervous and worried.

In his Lajna address, Huzoor said:

“I told our Jamaat’s Press Secretary that our task is not to please the people of the world, our task is to please Allah the Almighty and so we must be open about our beliefs and bear no complex or fear in this regard.”

Huzoor also mentioned Ayesha’s interview and commended her for speaking so well.

Thereafter, Huzoor said that wherever and whenever there were attacks on Islam, particularly relating to the role of women, Ahmadi ladies should write and respond.

This entire incident was personally very inspiring.

It reiterated the fact that we should never bear any complex in relation to the teachings of Islam or try to, *God forbid*, cover them up out of fear of negative publicity.

A lesson learned

During the afternoon, I joined my team as they were escorting different journalists around the Jalsa.

An Indian journalist, *Loveena Tandon*, had requested to record two panel discussions – one with men and one with ladies - and so both sittings were recorded that afternoon.

She had requested Ahmadis from different countries and so we were able to provide a wide spectrum of Ahmadis, as well as a couple of *Tabligh* guests.

One of the Ahmadis we invited to the discussion was a convert from the USA who I had seen before but had not personally met.

The journalist asked him his views on terrorism being conducted in Islam's name in the world. Upon hearing the question, and to my surprise, the Ahmadi immediately stood up and said he would not take any further part in the interview. He said he felt insulted that Islam was repeatedly linked to terrorism by media outlets and he did not want to be part of it.

The journalist handled the situation quite well and explained her reasoning behind the questions and said that she just wanted to hear his views and that if he was uncomfortable at any point she would stop recording.

After a few seconds the Ahmadi agreed to her request and thereafter he actually spoke very impressively about why the increased conflicts in the world had nothing to do with faith and how Islam had given him true inner peace.

The interview was a learning lesson for us as well. Normally, before all interviews we brief those about to be interviewed about the type of questions they are likely to be asked and only if they are comfortable do we put them forward for the interview. However, in the rush of Jalsa this process had been ignored and we had literally dragged a few people into our tent and asked them to take part. Thereafter, we tried to ensure that even during Jalsa all participants were fully briefed.

50th UK Jalsa... or not?

At around 4.30pm, Huzoor raised the *Liwai-e-Ahmadiyyat* (Flag of Ahmadiyyat) and thereafter proceeded to the main *Jalsa Gah* for the first formal session.

In the build up to this year's Jalsa there had been even more anticipation and excitement, given that this year's Jalsa was being celebrated as the *50th UK Jalsa Salana*.

However, there had also been some confusion. Though the UK Jamaat was celebrating its 50th Jalsa, some people had written to Huzoor to say that it was not the 50th Jalsa and there had been a miscalculation!

Thus, during the Jalsa inspection a few days earlier, Huzoor had instructed *the Officer Jalsa Salana*, Nasser Khan sahib to send a report about this matter and he also instructed Asif Basit sahib, in-charge of central *Archive Department*, to present a separate report.

During his address in the opening session, Huzoor spoke about this issue. He mentioned that the UK Jalsa Salana had been taking place since 1964 and since then there had been two years (1974 & 2001) when the UK Jalsa did not take place. Based on this, the current Jalsa was the 50th Jalsa in this sequence.



However, there was also a report published in *Al-Fazl* that two other events organised by the UK Jamaat were approved as Jalsa Salanas in the early 1950s by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II (ra). Based on this, it was actually the 52nd UK Jalsa Salana.

After mentioning this, Huzoor said that even if there had been a mistake, the reality was that this year was being celebrated by the UK Jamaat as the 50th Jalsa.

Furthermore, Huzoor said that anniversaries on their own were meaningless and that the barometer measuring the Jamaat's success was based on spirituality rather than time.

Huzoor said:

“The success of our Jamaat is not measured in years but in terms of whether we are each fulfilling the pledge that we have made to the Promised Messiah (as) and acting upon the ten conditions of our Bai’at.”

Later in his address, Huzoor referenced the *Olympics* that were taking place in Rio di Janeiro.

Huzoor said that the Brazilian Government, whose economy was already under a great deal of pressure, had spent billions on hosting the Olympics and setting up temporary infrastructure that would have little long-term benefit.

Huzoor said it would have been far better to spend those billions on long-term infrastructure and providing food, water and accommodation to those mired in poverty.

Huzoor said this was the difference between a worldly event and a spiritual event. He said that worldly events were generally superficial and sought short-term pleasure, whereas the purpose of a Jalsa Salana was to bring about long-term, spiritual rejuvenation and to inspire people to help those who are in need.

Comment of a Jalsa guest

Later, after the conclusion of the session, I met an Ahmadi guest from abroad and we talked about the potential miscalculation of the number of Jalsas in UK.

The Ahmadi said:

“I think Huzoor waited until we had all come for Jalsa to inform us that it might not actually be the 50th Jalsa! Otherwise we might have been less motivated to attend this year!”

He made this comment in a very light-hearted fashion and not in any seriousness. We both laughed and later I mentioned his comment to Huzoor.

Huzoor smiled and said:

“I did make it clear that even if it is not the 50th Jalsa, it is being celebrated as the 50th! And it is up to us when we mark such an event.”

Visit to Langhar Khana

As Huzoor left the *Jalsa Gah* and neared his car he looked in my direction and called me. Huzoor asked me if *Channel 4* had left satisfied over the issue of segregation or whether the journalist still objected.

I responded by saying:

“The journalist was not fully satisfied and I think she may still give a negative report, however my team was completely reassured and inspired when we received Huzoor’s guidance earlier.”

Huzoor then entered his car and the *Qafila* proceeded towards his residence, however on-route the cars stopped at the *langhar khana* (kitchen) and Huzoor went and inspected the food being prepared and he also went to the *roti plant* to check the quality of the *rotis* (Asian flatbread).

As Huzoor walked amongst them the volunteer workers in the *langhar* and *roti plant* raised deafening *naaray* (slogans) expressing their joy at Huzoor’s impromptu visit.

There were also some African Ahmadi brothers working in the *langhar* who started singing “*La-illaha-illa-Allah*” in the same famous and beautiful tune that our African brothers have done for many years.

The heat in the *langhar* was extreme and I kept wiping away sweat from my forehead, thinking of Huzoor wearing his *achkan coat* and *paghri* (turban). Despite the heat, the atmosphere for those few minutes was wonderful.

Spirit of service

Later that evening, I was talking to a young Khadim who was a local *Qaid* in the North of England. He told me that the previous evening he accompanied *Sadr Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya UK* as he did a late night check of the accommodation area at 1am.

The *Qaid* told me it had been bitterly cold and Sadr sahib had noticed that there was a young family resting in the accommodation tent with their young child, who was just two or three.

Upon seeing this, Sadr sahib told the local *Qaid* that Khuddam should offer their own sleeping blankets to such families so that they would have an extra layer of bedding. The *Qaid* immediately went and brought his bedding but the family insisted they were warm enough and that they would keep the child in the buggy seat during the night as that would be warmer.

Afterwards, the *Qaid* told me about this experience. He said:

“When Sadr sahib told me that the Khuddam should hand over our bedding and sleeping bag for the child, in my heart it seemed difficult for me personally. I had done duty outdoors all day and had the same duty the following day and so was desperate to have some rest. Anyway, it was tough to hand it over but this is our duty as Khuddam to serve others.”

As I listened to this incident, I thought to myself how special the training of Khilafat truly is, wherein it was ingrained in the Khuddam to sacrifice their own comfort for others.

On the other hand, I thought of the determination of the family to seek every last blessing of Jalsa and to put aside their own comfort for the sake of their faith and to be part of that spiritual atmosphere.

Just as Huzoor had said in his sermon earlier in the day, there were many Ahmadis who were willing to bear any difficulty or hardship for the sake of Jalsa Salana.

Presenting a media report

Later that evening, Huzoor returned to the *Jalsa Gah* to lead the *Maghreb* and *Isha* prayers and after completing them Huzoor called me towards him. He asked me how the media coverage for the first day of Jalsa had been.

In response, I mentioned that just minutes before *Namaz* both *The Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph* had published online pieces that were very positive.

I also mentioned how the *Channel 4* journalist who had objected to the segregation of Jalsa had just tweeted that Ahmadi women were not able to attend the various exhibitions at Jalsa, such as the *Review of Religions* exhibition where the *Al-Qalam* project was based. I said we had asked *Lajna* members to personally respond and to correct the journalist because proper arrangements had been made for the *Lajna* to attend the exhibitions and to partake in the *Al-Qalam* project.

I informed Huzoor that, apart from the many Ahmadi women who had corrected her, an English journalist, Lynda Bowyer, had also tweeted her saying that she had attended the Jalsa Salana UK in 2014 and had seen first-hand that Ahmadi women were not oppressed but were actually “*revered, respected and had all of their rights upheld*”.

Huzoor was pleased both by the comment of Lynda Bowyer and at the fact that members of Lajna Imaillah had promptly responded to the claims of *Channel 4*. Later, the journalist also accepted her error in this regard.

Dragging Mahid home!

After *Namaz*, I went and ate some of the famous *langhar aloo ghosht* and thereafter I went to find Mala and the children so we could drive back home for a few hours rest. Mahid seemed to have had a really enjoyable day attending the *Jalsa* and meeting his cousins. I literally had to drag him to the car as he pleaded to stay at *Hadeeqatul Mahdi*.

As we began our journey home he kept repeating the word “*Jalsa*” asking me to turn the car around until he finally fell asleep.

It had also been the first time ever Moshahid had been to *Jalsa* and despite the long day he had remained well with the *Grace of Allah*.

Uncle Bill and memories of old

When we returned home, I switched on *MTA* and it was broadcasting a panel discussion recorded earlier in the day at *Jalsa*. One of the panelists was an English convert, Bilal Atkinson sahib, who has been the *Regional Amir* in the North East for many years.

Bilal sahib converted to Ahmadiyyat in the late 1980s in Hartlepool following *Tabligh* by my father, the late Dr. Hameed Ahmad Khan. Before

becoming Ahmadi, Bilal sahib's birth name was 'Bill' and so ever since I was a child I had known him as 'Uncle Bill'.

As I watched Bilal sahib on MTA, I was reminded of that period in my life when I was a young boy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Masha'Allah* both my father and my mother the late, Sajidah Hameed, were very active in *Tabligh* and were able to convert dozens of English people to Ahmadiyyat.

Every night after my father returned home from work there would be English guests who would come and join us at our home. We had two living rooms and so on one side it would be the ladies sitting with my mother and on the other side it would be the men sitting with my father. As a young boy, I remember feeling very proud that I was the only person who had access to both the men's and the ladies side!

I used to have two regular jobs. One was that my mother used to give me food and tea to send to the men's side and the other was at the end of the evening to go and inform the ladies when their husbands were ready to go home.

Often it would be after 11 or even midnight by the time the final guest had left. As a child, I used to find this daily routine extremely exciting and I also thought it was completely normal and happened in every household.

It was only when I became an adult and had my own home and family that I realised that inviting guests and persuading them to come to your home regularly is not easy.

Lost in translation

Despite our love for our English uncles and aunts there were the occasional culture clashes! For example, during the MTA panel discussion uncle Bill narrated his very first experience of Jalsa Salana.

He said that he was listening to a speech and everything was going well and then suddenly an Ahmadi jumped up and raised *naaray* (slogans) in an extremely loud noise.

Being a serving police officer at the time, uncle Bill thought that perhaps somebody was about to do an attack or was inciting others to do so! He said he became very anxious and worried until the whole concept of *naaray* was explained to him.

Uncle Bill (Bilal sahib) said:

“Nearly 30 years later, those same slogans that initially made me fearful and worried are now a means of peace and contentment for me and fill my heart with happiness. Now, I look forward to hearing the passionate voices of the Ahmadis and responding to their slogans along with the other people in the Jalsa Gah.”

We also had another English Ahmadi, who we knew as ‘uncle Morris’ but who after becoming Ahmadi changed his name to ‘Mahmood’. He told me about one thing that used to confuse him initially when he met my parents.

Uncle Morris (Mahmood sahib) said:

“Your family was extremely kind, however whenever I used to come to your home you all used to have your coats on and so every time I thought I had come when you were about to go out. Finally, after a few months I asked your father Dr. Hameed if I was disrupting your family’s plans as you were all wearing your coats. In response, he laughed and said that you kept your coats on so that you could keep the heating costs down!”

It was true, I remember we did sometimes wear our coats in our home and probably it was because my parents were trying to keep the heating costs down!

Defence Minister’s visit to Jalsa

The following morning, Huzoor left his residence at 12pm and travelled to address the members of *Lajna Imaillah*.

However, before doing so Huzoor met briefly with Lord Earl Howe, a *UK Government Defence Minister*, outside his residence.

Lord Howe informed Huzoor how impressed he had been upon seeing the Jalsa and the way in which volunteers were managing virtually everything.

An example of Huzoor’s love and concern

Prior to Huzoor’s address to Lajna, he distributed prizes to dozens of Lajna students who had excelled. As I watched on the screen from the men’s *Jalsa*

Gah, I noticed that when one girl approached, Huzoor asked her how a member of her family was.

It later transpired that she was the sister of Mazhar Ahsan, a graduate of *Jamia Ahmadiyya UK* who had been seriously ill with cancer. Though at that time, he was said to be recovering, it was the *Will of Allah* that he passed away in September 2016 (*To Allah we belong and to Him shall we return*).

When I saw Huzoor ask the girl, I was amazed at how even at his most busy times, Huzoor still finds the time to comfort those who are in need or facing difficulty.

Huzoor's Lajna address

Huzoor's address to Lajna that day was filled with many beautiful points and incidents for both Ahmadi women and men to learn from.

Huzoor said that segments of the *Western* media sought to portray Islam as an unfair religion in which women were, *God forbid*, discriminated against or oppressed. However, he explained that Allah has attributed men and women different roles and this was not inequality, rather it was nature.

Huzoor cited how recently the *UK Government* had given women soldiers permission to fight on the front lines during conflicts or battles. However, some respected retired military leaders had openly criticised this policy and said it had the potential to undermine the army's security. They argued that male soldiers would lose focus and would naturally seek to first defend their female soldiers, even where it was not necessarily in the interest of the

battle. Huzoor said he agreed with this view and that this objection showed that even non-Muslims understood that differences did exist between men and women.

Meeting with Scottish MP

Following the Lajna address, Huzoor walked across to the men's Jalsa Gah and led the *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers. After it concluded, Huzoor met Margaret Ferrier MP, who was elected to the UK Parliament in 2015.

As her constituency is in Scotland, the MP offered her sympathies regarding the martyrdom of Assad Shah sahib in Glasgow earlier this year.

In response, Huzoor said:

"The Government and authorities must remain vigilant at all times not only to protect Ahmadis but to protect all members of society."

Hearing this the MP said she had been very impressed by the standard of security at the Jalsa, and particularly when she was told that all those doing security, were Ahmadi volunteers.

Fear of falling asleep!

Thereafter, Huzoor returned to his residence where I saw *Officer Jalsa Salana*, Nasser Khan sahib. His eyes were extremely bloodshot and even whilst standing I thought he might fall asleep! I asked if he was able to get any sleep during Jalsa.

In response, Nasser sahib said:

“During these three days, I am able to sleep for a maximum of a couple of hours here and there. My greatest fear is to fall asleep whilst sitting on the stage in the Jalsa Gah. Actually, I have to admit it has happened a few times and in fact once my daughter texted me to wake up as she saw me sleeping on MTA!”

Comments of Ghana’s Chief Imam

At around 4pm on Saturday 14 August, Huzoor proceeded to the *Jalsa Gah* to preside the afternoon session of Jalsa.

Before and after Huzoor’s arrival several guest speakers, including politicians, faith leaders and dignitaries, from various countries took to the stage in turn. They each shared their own impressions of the Jalsa and of the Jamaat.

One of the guest speakers was Dr. Sheikh Nuhu Sharubatu, the *Chief Imam and Mufti of Ghana*. In Ghana, he is considered the highest living authority on Islam and extremely respected.

He openly praised the positive contribution of the Jamaat to society and its service to Islam. As I listened to him, I thought how his words were in such stark contrast to the Maulvis and Mullahs of Pakistan and other Muslim nations who cursed us, opposed us and had orchestrated the persecution of our Jamaat for decades.

Sheikh Usman Nuhu, Chief Imam and Mufti said:

“I am extremely pleased to attend your Jalsa and would like to express my gratitude to the Khalifa. In Ghana, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is known as an entirely peaceful Jamaat who are making every effort to bring people together and to strive for peace. As we are together today may we all one day join together in Paradise”

Speaking about his personal relationship with the late Abdul Wahab Adam sahib, who served as Amir and Missionary-in-Charge Ghana for many years until his passing in 2014, the Chief Imam Ghana said:

“I had a deep respect for Maulvi Abdul Wahab Adam and I always took his counsel before making important decisions. I held his view in extremely high regard.”

A box of chocolates

As I listened to his address, I could not help but remember *Wahab Adam sahib*, a truly great servant of our Jamaat.

The first time I ever had the opportunity to travel with Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) was on his visit to West Africa during the *Khilafat-Centenary* year in 2008.

Despite his elderly age and despite the great responsibility of hosting Khalifatul Masih, I never saw Wahab Adam sahib without a smile on his face.

The same was true whenever he came to London. His respect and love for *Khilafat* was incredible and at the same time Huzoor's love for him was also forever evident.

Once in London, Wahab Adam sahib handed me a box of chocolates. I was surprised and asked him if there was any special reason or occasion for which he was gifting me these chocolates.

In reply, Wahab sahib said:

“There is only one reason and that is because you keep me informed through your Press Releases of the activities of my beloved Khalifa.”

I later narrated this to Huzoor and he appreciated very much the sincerity and love of Wahab sahib's answer. However, he also taught me a point of etiquette for future.

Huzoor said:

“If an elder like Wahab sahib gives you some chocolates then you should say Jazak'Allah rather than asking what the reason is that he is giving to you!”

Whilst saying this, Huzoor smiled but it was clear that he thought that my question to Wahab sahib was not appropriate.

Huzoor's Saturday afternoon Jalsa address

Huzoor's afternoon address on Saturday afternoon at Jalsa Salana UK is traditionally an *annual report* of the Jamaat's worldwide activities and progress during the past year.

It is the address in which we find out how many *Bai'ats* there have been worldwide during the past year and how many countries our Jamaat is established in.

Huzoor gives a detailed report about the services of the Jamaat in different countries and narrates faith-inspiring stories of how Allah is guiding people towards Ahmadiyyat.

Huzoor also presents a report about the activities of the central offices of the Jamaat. Thus, a few weeks before Jalsa, *Wakalat-e-Tabshir* sends a circular to all central offices asking for them to submit their annual report. Our *Press & Media office* is also instructed to send its report.

Extremely graciously, Huzoor mentions some of the activities of each office so that the members of the Jamaat have some idea of the work that is being done in different countries.

In this year's report, we once again learned how the blessings of Allah the Almighty had continued to rain down upon our Jamaat.

Huzoor informed that the Jamaat was now established in 209 countries and that during the past year the Jamaat had spread to Paraguay and the Cayman

Islands for the very first time. Hence, the revelation of the Promised Messiah (as) that ***“I shall cause thy message to reach the corners of the earth”*** continued to be fulfilled.



Huzoor also informed that, *Masha'Allah*, during the past year over 584,000 people had done Bai'at and joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Meetings with delegations

By the time the session was completed it was around 7pm and Huzoor returned to his residence for a few minutes.

A few minutes later, Huzoor proceeded to a temporary office that had been set up behind his residence and over the course of the next couple of hours Huzoor met delegations from different countries.

Even though he had given two addresses earlier in the day and the fact that he had to give the concluding address the following day, Huzoor gave ample time to each group.

The delegations consisted of both Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis. Some of the guests were dignitaries, some were journalists, some were Tabligh contacts.

Croatia delegation

The first group to meet Huzoor was a delegation who had travelled from Croatia. It included two Members of Parliament, one of whom was the Vice President of the Social Democratic Party.

After a discussion about the political situation in Croatia, one of the guests asked Huzoor his views on Donald Trump.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“If he is elected I do not think he will put into practice all of the extreme policies he has campaigned upon like banning all Muslims as such policies will be very difficult to enforce. Let us see what happens.”

Ireland delegation

The next delegation to meet Huzoor was a group from Ireland, including a senior Police Officer.

The latter informed Huzoor that he had attended the Jalsa UK last year and had been so impressed by its spiritual atmosphere that he had been eager to return this year.

Upon hearing this, Huzoor said:

“Have you seen how the people attending this Jalsa greet each other with so much love and kindness – this is true Islam.”

The guest said that he was amazed at how the vast majority of the Jalsa arrangements had been conducted by volunteers and said his only conclusion was that ***“Ahmadis are amazing organisers”***.

Huzoor smiled and said:

“I think your Irish army needs training from us!”

The police officer mentioned that he was from Northern Ireland.

In response, Huzoor said:

“I have never been to Northern Ireland and so I will try to visit in the future, Insha’Allah.”

Walking out and then back in again!

In between the meetings, as each delegation filed out, I would also walk out of the room and then re-enter when the next delegation entered.

Having observed this, Huzoor looked at me and said:

“Why do you keep walking out in between each meeting? Are you planning to go and personally see off each guest?”

I did not really have any answer! The reason I walked out was because Majid sahib walked out and so I just followed him.

Thereafter, I stayed in the office whenever one delegation was leaving and another one was entering and during the brief intervals between meetings, Huzoor would often mention something or enquire about my Jalsa experiences.

Sometimes, the next delegation would enter before Huzoor’s comment was completed or before I had answered and thus the conversation would continue when the meeting with the subsequent delegation was finished.

French Guyana delegation

Next, Huzoor met a delegation from French Guyana. The guests spoke in French and so Basharat Ahmad, a *Missionary* qualified from *Jamia Ahmadiyya UK* who is now posted in French Guyana, translated.

The group consisted of the *Sadr Jamaat*, his two daughters and a journalist.

The journalist asked Huzoor if the world was genuinely close to a nuclear war.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“It is no longer only me who is saying that we are close to a Third World War, in which nuclear weapons could be used. In fact, many politicians, military figures, historians and analysts are now openly saying the same. It is true that a Third World War could erupt at any time and there are some extremely trigger-happy leaders and groups who do not consider the consequences and implications of their actions. Thus, it is certainly not impossible that nuclear weapons could be used.”

The journalist spoke of how some weeks earlier a Catholic Priest in France had been beheaded inside his church by a terrorist.

She said she had seen how Ahmadi Muslims in France had openly condemned this atrocity, however she wanted to know how clashes between Muslims and other people could be avoided.

In response, Huzoor said:

“I have said repeatedly and categorically that these extremists and terrorists are not serving Islam or following its teachings, rather all they are doing is defaming it. Recently, Pope Francis said that in all religions there are people who hold fundamentalist and extremist views and that their views and acts have no link to the religion. I appreciated this statement a great deal and consider the Pope’s words to be extremely sensible and wise. This is the message that we need to propagate to reduce tensions and to bring people together.”

Paraguay and Sierra Leone delegations

Thereafter, Huzoor met guests who had come from Paraguay, including a representative from the country's Ministry of Urban Development.

The guest thanked Huzoor for the humanitarian service provided by *Humanity First* following a very large earthquake that had occurred in March.

Huzoor then met with the *Deputy Speaker* of Sierra Leone's National Parliament.

He was a slim man and noticing this, Huzoor smiled and said:

"Most of the politicians I have met from your country tend to be a little healthier in size but you have kept yourself very smart!"

The politician laughed and thanked Huzoor for the compliment. He then asked for Huzoor's prayers for his country.

In response, Huzoor said:

"I personally know the President of Sierra Leone and have found him to be humble."

Meeting with Benin Defence Minister

That evening Huzoor also met the Federal Defence Minister of Benin who said that the experience of attending the UK Jalsa Salana had proved completely unique and he felt ***“as though the entire world was joined here at the Jalsa”***.

The Minister then asked:

“Your slogan ‘Love for all, Hatred for None’ seems to be a divine message to me. Where did this slogan come from?”

In reply, Huzoor said:

“You are right it is a divine message from God Almighty because this slogan is a summary of the teachings of the Holy Quran.”

A moment with Huzoor

As the meetings with the various delegations concluded, Huzoor called me and asked how the day had been. Huzoor then mentioned his address to the Lajna earlier in the day.

Huzoor said:

“I spoke purposely about certain contemporary issues during the Lajna address today. I mentioned the incident from Channel 4 yesterday and how you became worried when they raised the issue of segregation.”

I said that members of *Lajna Imaillah*, in particular, would draw great inspiration from Huzoor's address and hopefully would become more involved in defending Islam through the media.

Hearing this, Huzoor smiled and referred to the interview given by Ayesha Malik to *Channel 4* in response to the question about segregation.

“Masha’Allah Ayesha speaks well and she also uses good words in her interviews. For example, in this one she said that segregation was a means of ‘empowering’ women!”

An affectionate moment

As Huzoor's meetings with the various groups concluded, Huzoor walked out of his office and towards his car. However, just as he was about to enter his young grandson, *Muaaz* (son of Mirza Waqas Ahmad) came running towards him.

Muaaz immediately held Huzoor's hand and started walking.

Most affectionately, Huzoor walked in the direction that Muaaz was pulling him and they went inside a small room near Huzoor's residence.

After a few minutes, they returned outside and then having spent a few moments with his grandson, Huzoor entered his car.

It was a delightful and extremely affectionate scene.

An impromptu visit

Huzoor's Qafila then proceeded towards the main Jalsa area where thousands of Ahmadis were either eating dinner or visiting the various exhibitions and stalls that had been set up.

Huzoor's car proceeded past the *Jalsa Gah* and as I saw this, I said to Mubarak Zafar sahib that I had a feeling Huzoor may be about to visit the *Review of Religions* exhibition. My feeling was proven true as the cars stopped just outside the *Review* marquee.

The *Review of Religions* had once again set up an extremely interesting exhibition that included a replica of the *Turin Shroud*, the *Al-Qalam* project and various Islamic artifacts that were from amongst the personal collection of Razwan Baig sahib.

When Huzoor arrived at the *Review* exhibition it was filled with Ahmadi ladies. Some were taking part in the *Al-Qalam* project, whilst others were looking at other parts of the exhibition.

Emotions of Lajna

I will never forget the look of shock and unbridled joy on the faces of the Ahmadi women as Huzoor entered.

No one, not even Amer Safir, the *Chief-Editor* of *Review of Religions*, knew Huzoor was about to come to the exhibition and so as the ladies saw Huzoor

enter they were overcome with emotion. Many of the women had tears in their eyes.



It was an unforgettable scene and in its own way reminded me of Huzoor's tour of Ghana in 2008.

Back then, one day after *Fajr*, Huzoor inspected the Jalsa Salana arrangements and when he entered an area where women had been cooking the ladies became completely overwhelmed with joy and emotion.

Later, some Ahmadi ladies who had happened to be present at the exhibition told me that they could not believe their luck to see Huzoor in such an informal setting. Normally, they would see Huzoor in formal sessions of *Jalsa* or *Ijtemas* but here he was walking amongst them and talking to different people.

Those few moments were extremely emotional and joyous.

Meeting with Barrie Schwartz

After inspecting the *Al-Qalam* project, Huzoor spoke briefly to Mr. Barrie Schwartz, from the United States, who had displayed a replica of the Turin Shroud for the second consecutive year at Jalsa.



Whilst talking to Huzoor, Mr. Schwartz pointed to Amer Safir and said that he was extremely impressed that Huzoor had appointed a young person as the *Chief Editor* and it was extremely positive that the Jamaat was giving young people responsibility.

Upon hearing this and to my immense surprise, Huzoor smiled and pointed in my direction before saying:

“He is my Press Secretary and he is also young!”

In response, Mr. Schwartz said:

“Really? That is great! Young people are the future!”

I felt very emotional after this conversation. As Ahmadis, we are desperate for any opportunity to serve Khilafat and to be linked to Khalifatul Masih in any way. Any form of service to Khalifa-Waqt is a great blessing and privilege.

Thereafter, Mr. Schwartz said that he felt the general public in the United States were still not very aware of the work and services of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. He said the entire nation would benefit from knowing about the Jamaat.

In response, Huzoor said:

“There has been some improvement in the past couple of years. Our media teams in the United States have made greater efforts and so with the Grace of Allah some in-roads are being made.”

A sea of Ahmadis

After visiting the Review of Religions marquee, Huzoor walked towards the *Makhzan-e-Tasaweer* photographic exhibition and as he did thousands of Ahmadis approached from both sides overwhelmed with joy that Huzoor was amongst them. They raised deafeningly loud *naaray* (slogans) exhibiting their happiness at Huzoor’s sudden and unannounced visit.

After visiting the *Makhzan* exhibition, Huzoor sat in his car and the Qafila proceeded a few hundred metres. Though a very small distance it took the cars a few minutes to navigate because the Ahmadis continued to run side-by-side and even in between the cars.

Mubarak Zafar sahib and I had lost our car and so we jumped into a *Jeep* that was being driven by a Khadim on duty. All we could see was sea of people on both sides holding up their mobile phones to take a video or photo of that precious moment. The spiritual atmosphere for those few minutes was quite incredible.

Meeting with Vice President of Uganda

After a few minutes, Huzoor arrived at a small marquee opposite the main *Jalsa Gah* where a meeting had been arranged with the *Vice-President of Uganda* who was attending the Jalsa.

As the meeting started, Huzoor noticed Tariq BT sahib (Lord Tariq Ahmad) and called him over and invited him to sit on the sofa next to him.

During the meeting, Vice President thanked Huzoor on behalf of Uganda's Government for the educational and humanitarian services rendered by the Jamaat and *Humanity First* in their country.

The Vice President informed Huzoor that oil had recently been discovered and that oil companies from abroad were researching the feasibility of extracting it.

Huzoor said that it should be explored but that any wealth derived should be used fairly for the benefit of the Ugandan people.

A member of the local Ugandan Jamaat was also present and he informed Huzoor that the Vice President had been scheduled to attend the Olympics in Brazil but had cancelled his plan in order to attend the Jalsa.

Hearing this, Huzoor smiled and said:

“This Jalsa is also an Olympics! However, it is a spiritual Olympics not a worldly or sporting one!”

Thereafter, Huzoor returned to the *Jalsa Gah* and led the *Maghreb* and *Isha* prayers.

Tabshir Dinner

For many years, certainly as long as I can remember, it has been a tradition that on the second evening of Jalsa Salana, *Wakalat-Tabshir* hosts a dinner graced by the presence of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih (aba).

Tabshir invites dignitaries and guests from around the world, as well as Ahmadi representatives of different Jamaats and central *Markazi* offices.

This year when we entered, I was told that a seat had been reserved for me on the head table. I felt very embarrassed by this, however Additional Wakil-ul-Tabshir, Abdul Majid Tahir sahib and a few other people insisted and so I took a seat about six places to the left of where Huzoor was seated.

Seated immediately to my left was Amir Sahib Indonesia.

During the dinner, Amir Sahib told me about the current situation of Ahmadis in Indonesia, where there has been a lot of persecution in recent years.

He said the situation had improved to some extent under Indonesia's new Government elected in 2014 and that the Government had curbed some of the more extremist Mullahs (clerics). Sadly, still there remained areas where the conditions for Ahmadis were extremely difficult.

Amir Sahib Indonesia is very softly spoken and I have always seen him have a smile on his face.

However, as he spoke his next words I could feel the pain in his voice and the sadness in his eyes.

Amir Sahib said:

“Though the conditions have improved it is still not safe enough for us to invite Huzoor to Indonesia. The Ahmadis in our country are desperate to see him and so we can only pray that Allah the Almighty opens the doors to such blessings for us as well.”

Following the conclusion of the dinner, Huzoor returned to his residence after an extremely blessed day.

Mahid's earpiece

On Sunday 14 August, the final day of Jalsa, we arrived early morning at *Hadeeqatul Mahdi*. I dropped my wife Mala and children near where some other of our family members were congregated.

Just as I was about to head down to our Press office I heard Mahid's voice calling loudly '*Abba*'.

I turned around to see Mahid running towards me. It turned out he wanted his ear piece for Jalsa translation from the car! The day before someone had handed him a broken ear piece which he had carried around with him ever since. Every so often he would place it to his ear and try to listen intently!

Anyway, I hurried back to the car found the ear piece and handed it to him. He immediately put it to his ear and rushed off to show some of his young cousins the device.

One of the young cousins was called *Adeeb* from Rabwah, who told me that during the past two days, Mahid had been extremely excited by Jalsa and every few minutes would shout "*Let's go!*" randomly! Mahid never specified where they should go but was adamant that they should all go somewhere!

A moment of panic

That morning, I had a real moment of panic. Throughout the Jalsa period, I had been taking notes in a small spiral notebook. I am always fearful of misplacing it and so try my best to ensure it never leaves my hands but as I

was walking that morning, I suddenly felt as though something was missing. The first thing I checked was if I had my *topi* (cap), which I did. The second thing I checked was my notebook and it was not in my hand!

For a few seconds, genuinely my heartbeat became very fast. The first thing that came to my mind was that Huzoor instructed me to write a diary of this year's Jalsa days and if I had lost my diary then I had lost all the information and material and would not be able to write anything!

At that time, I left everything else and retraced my steps from that morning. After some time, I recalled that I had visited the *MTA Media Centre* earlier and so I went there and to my immense relief I saw the diary placed on a table near where I had been sitting!

International Bai'at

One part of Jalsa that everyone looks forward to is the *International Bai'at*, which takes place at around 1pm on the final day. For every single Ahmadi, it is an extremely emotional and spiritual experience.

I have taken part in *Bai'at* ceremonies in different countries and they are always emotional but the depth of emotion felt at the *International Bai'at* is truly unique.

The *Bai'at* ceremony this year was no different. I was seated a couple of metres behind Huzoor and so I saw the sea of people in front, each holding onto the person in front.

Whilst I focused on repeating the words of Huzoor, who was wearing the blessed light brown overcoat of the Promised Messiah (as), the sounds of Ahmadis overcome with emotion and in tears was apparent in all directions.



This was especially true when Huzoor led a *Sajdah-e-Shukar* (supplication of thanks to God Almighty).

Brief meetings with guests

Following the conclusion of *Salat*, Huzoor met two politicians outside the Jalsa Gah.

One was Paul Scully MP and the other was Ed Davey who had been Energy Minister under the previous Government in the UK.

Huzoor asked them both how they were and the guests congratulated Huzoor on the success of the Jalsa.

Concluding Session of Jalsa Salana

The final session of Jalsa Salana UK began just after 4pm on 14 August. When, Huzoor arrived in the Jalsa Gah certain dignitaries were delivering short remarks and these continued in Huzoor's presence.

The first guest speaker was Ed Davey and he mentioned how he had the opportunity to travel to Rio for the Olympics but had decided to stay in the UK and now had the opportunity to attend what he called the ***"biggest faith Olympics in the world"***.

Ed Davey also remarked that in the past he had occasionally considered Huzoor's views on world affairs to be somewhat 'pessimistic', however he had now realised that Huzoor's words had proved *"prophetic"* and that it was now clear that the world was edging ever closer to another World War.

Paul Scully MP said:

"Every time I meet Ahmadis I learn something new and today I saw the Bai'at ceremony for the very first time. Seeing the physical, emotional and spiritual connection between the Ahmadis and His Holiness was unique and truly inspiring."

Lord Tariq Ahmad, also took to the stage and presented a message of support from the UK's new Prime Minister Theresa May.

Before delivering the message, Tariq sahib spoke of his pride at being an Ahmadi Muslim and the way in which the Jamaat was spreading Islam's true message under the guidance of Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyyat.

Following the short remarks by the various dignitaries, the formal session began.

Huzoor's concluding address

Huzoor's concluding address was very beautiful and educational. He spoke of how increasing numbers of people claimed that religion was the cause of violence and wars. In particular, it was alleged that Islamic teaching was, *God forbid*, the main source of evil and the lack of peace in the world.

Huzoor explained how the complete opposite was true. He said that the reason there was increasing bloodshed and violence was because people had forgotten the moral teachings of religion.

During his address, Huzoor also spoke in detail about the rights of parents in Islam. He spoke of how in the developed world people were almost exclusively focused on careers or their own lives and were failing in their duties towards their elderly parents. Hence, it was common for parents to end up in care homes.

Huzoor gave the example of a Japanese man who had recently murdered 19 elderly people at a care home and when questioned why he said it was because he could not bear to see them suffering and so it was better to

‘euthanize’ them. Huzoor said that this was the example of the so-called ‘civilised and developed’ world.

Huzoor then gave Islamic teachings regarding the rights of parents. He told how the Quran instructed Muslims to never raise their voices or to exhibit anger or frustration towards their parents.



Hearing this made me feel personally very emotional.

It is only since I became a parent myself that I have begun to comprehend the sacrifices and selfless way in which my parents looked after me. I am sure the same is true for other people.

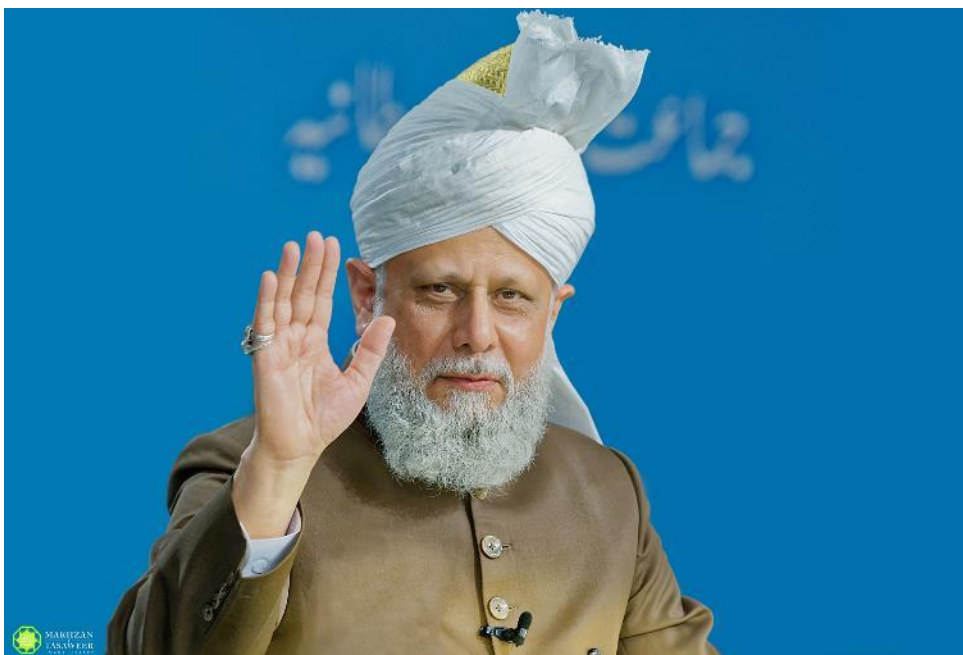
Huzoor’s concluding address ended with him reiterating his warning that the world was moving towards another world war.

However, Huzoor also gave the glad tiding that when peace was finally established in the world ***“it will be through the teachings of Islam”***.

Post-Jalsa moments

The Jalsa concluded at 6.55pm with a silent prayer led by Huzoor. Thereafter, Huzoor informed that more than 38,000 people had attended this year's Jalsa - an increase of over 3,000 from 2015.

Huzoor then remained in the Jalsa Gah for a further 15 minutes as he listened to the *naaray* (slogans) of Ahmadiis and to the *Nazms* recited by different groups. You could feel and see the emotion on the face of every single person present.



I have travelled to many different countries with Huzoor but still I would say that there is little that compares with the power and spirituality of the final few moments of the UK Jalsa.

As the *Nazms* continued, I think the organisers had omitted a *Nazm* from *Jamia Ahmadiyya* students.

Huzoor has great love for Jamia and so he noticed this oversight. Thus, from the stage, very affectionately and lovingly, Huzoor said:

“They tried to remove the recognition of Jamia but this can never happen!”

After a few more moments, Huzoor left the stage and walked straight to the *MTA Translations* marquee where he met all the volunteers who had translated the entire Jalsa proceedings into 14 different languages.

As Huzoor left the marquee a little boy, who looked no older than three, called out loudly: “*Huzoor, Huzoor*”. Upon hearing his voice, Huzoor turned towards the child, smiled and waved back at him.

The little boy was so happy and delighted. He turned to his friend and said:

“Huzoor waved at me! Huzoor looked at me!”

With that, Huzoor entered his car and headed back towards the residence at Hadeeqatul Mahdi. When he arrived, Amir Sahib and Officer Jalsa Salana both personally met Huzoor to offer *mubarakbaad* on the completion of Jalsa.

Huzoor’s work continues

In so many respects, the Jalsa had proven extremely blessed.

From a personal point of view, I was extremely relieved that the media coverage seemed to have gone well and was an improvement on previous years.

Almost immediately, the wind-up of Jalsa began. Marquees and tents began to come down, whilst thousands of people headed back to their homes.

However, as people departed, Huzoor's work and duties continued and so just a few minutes after returning to the residence, Huzoor returned to his office to meet more delegations from different countries.

Iceland delegation

The first group Huzoor met that evening was a delegation that had travelled to the Jalsa from Iceland. This included some *Tabligh* contacts, some academics and an Icelandic journalist.

During the meeting, one of the guests commented:

"I have to say I was amazed by this Jalsa. There were 38,000 people present – yet everything was peaceful, well-organised and extremely calm. It is a surprise for me that it is possible to hold such an event."

In response, Huzoor smiled and said:

"All of the arrangements at Hadeeqatul Mahdi are makeshift and not permanent structures. In any other place to host 38,000 people for three days without any disturbance and unpleasant incidents is extremely

difficult but it is not difficult for us because Ahmadi Muslims are following the teachings of Islam and so our conduct is peaceful throughout.”

The meeting concluded when one of the guests said:

“Your Holiness, we would love for you to visit Iceland because our country also needs to hear what Islam’s true teachings are.”

Meeting with Canadian MP

Huzoor’s next meeting was with Deb Schulte, a *Federal Member of Parliament* from Canada.

She was very familiar with our Jamaat because her constituency, or ‘riding’ as it is known in Canada, incorporates Peace Village.

Nonetheless, during the meeting she expressed her amazement at the Jalsa proceedings.

Mrs Schulte then said:

“Your Holiness, I have heard you are coming to Canada later this year?”

Huzoor, smiled and said:

“It is being said that I am!”

Mrs. Schulte said:

“If you do come then we sincerely look forward to welcoming and receiving you in our country.”

Spanish delegation

The next group to meet Huzoor was a larger delegation from Spain. Amongst the group, were some familiar faces, including a couple of Spanish politicians who Huzoor described as his “old friends”.

One of the Spanish guests, who had attended the Jalsa for the first time, said:

“What I felt during these three days of the Jalsa was that I was part of one huge family. The way every volunteer looked after me and cared for me and their spirit of sacrifice has had a very profound effect upon me.”

Another guest said:

“I have been to events previously hosted by other Muslim sects but the unity and oneness of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is completely unique and unparalleled.”

In response, Huzoor said:

“This unity you will not see anywhere else because this unity is based on the true teachings of Islam and the fact that all Ahmadis have accepted the Promised Messiah (as).”

Also, amongst the delegation were a Spanish husband and wife who were attending the Jalsa for the third year in a row. I personally knew them well, as the first year they came as journalists and our office had been their hosts. They had enjoyed the experience so much that they had come back the last two years in a personal capacity.

As the meeting concluded the husband saw me and suddenly hugged me extremely tightly and warmly.

In fact, I had never been embraced so strongly ever before! I felt a little embarrassed but I did learn that Spanish people maintain and remember friendships.

As the guests left the office, Huzoor looked up at me and said:

“It seems you have very close relations with that guest!”

Belize and Jamaica delegations

The subsequent meeting was with a delegation of new-Ahmadis, journalists and politicians who had travelled to the Jalsa from Jamaica and Belize.

A lady, who had recently converted to Ahmadiyyat said:

“I have never cried and wept as much as I did during this Jalsa. I have never been so inspired or felt the emotions that I felt here.”

Responding, very beautifully, Huzoor said:

“You cannot find such inspiration anywhere else. Now it is your duty to take this message of true Islam and share it with the people of your land.”

Huzoor continued by saying:

“You should start this great task from your own home by doing Tabligh to your own family first of all.”

One of the media guests asked:

“How does your Community communicate its message of peace, at a time when so many people associate Islam with violence?”

In response, Huzoor said:

“We are a missionary community that seeks to spread Islam’s teachings and we are determined to achieve our mission. Hence, we will always strive to overcome every obstacle that comes in our path. This is our challenge and we are determined to fulfill it. That is why we built this temporary village here in Hadeeqatul Mahdi – these are the ways that we are communicating our message – by bringing people together.”

A pioneer Ahmadi

Huzoor then met with a new Ahmadi convert from the Cayman Islands.

Addressing the convert, Huzoor very movingly said:

“With the grace of Allah, you are a pioneer Ahmadi and your name will be written down in the history of Ahmadiyyat and it is now your responsibility to further spread the message of Islam to your people.”

Meeting with Haiti’s Secretary of State

The next meeting was with a delegation of guests from Italy, followed by a meeting with guests from Haiti.

One of the guests in the Haiti delegation was a *Secretary of State*, who had previously served as Haiti’s *Minister of Religion*. The Minister informed Huzoor that in his previous position he had sought to get our Jamaat officially registered but this had not yet been achieved.

The *Secretary of State* said:

“Only a few days before coming to the Jalsa, I was promoted to Secretary of State and now upon returning I will inform my Government about the work of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community that I have seen first-hand here. I will tell the other Ministers that I have never seen any event in my life that compares to the Jalsa Salana and how my view of Islam has changed completely during these three days.”

In response, Huzoor said:

“What you have seen here is the true Islam, which is entirely peaceful.”

Austria, Belgium and Egypt delegations

The delegations continued as Huzoor met a large group of guests who had travelled from Belgium to attend the Jalsa and a delegation from Austria, as well as a guest from Egypt.

Upon meeting Huzoor, a female guest from Belgium said:

“Your Holiness, your concluding address earlier today had a deep effect upon me. I now wish to do Bai’at and also wish for my children to be raised as Ahmadis.”

In response, Huzoor said:

“You should continue to pray for some time and also you should discuss this matter with your husband.”

It was interesting to me how Huzoor did not accept the *Bai’at* there and then but told her to continue to pray and to consult her husband.

It highlighted the fact that Huzoor wanted a person to be fully aware of the consequences of doing *Bai’at* and did not want a person to take a decision based on the emotions of a few days.

Rather, it was better they took some time to pray and reflect before joining the Jamaat so that if they did then join the Jamaat their faith would be stronger.

Namaz and return to Masjid Fazl

The meetings continued until 9.30pm and once concluded, Huzoor proceeded directly to the *Jalsa Gah* to lead the *Maghreb* and *Isha* prayers.

Thereafter, Imam sahib (Ataul Mujeeb Rashed sahib) led several *Nikahs* (marriage ceremonies) during which Huzoor was present and so by the time Huzoor returned to his residence it was after 10pm and soon thereafter, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (Huzoor's respected wife) departed for *Masjid Fazl*, where they arrived after 11pm.

A busy week ahead

The three days of Jalsa had proven extremely blessed and yet Huzoor's activities would remain as busy, if not more so, during the coming week.

Over the next week, Huzoor would continue to meet various delegations from around the world, as well as conduct a series of interviews with journalists from different countries. He would hold meetings with various dignitaries, whilst at the same time meet hundreds of Ahmadi families.

Furthermore, Huzoor would continue to go through the thousands of letters that comprised his office mail and letters from Ahmadi worldwide.

As a bystander, I was left quite shocked at the scale and volume of Huzoor's activities. I had seen first-hand Huzoor's activities during various tours but the scale of Huzoor's schedule during the week before and after Jalsa Salana UK was beyond anything I had seen before.

Meeting with Arabs

On the morning of Monday, 15 August, Huzoor held several meetings with different delegations. The smaller delegations were held in Huzoor's own office, whilst the larger ones were held in the *Mahmood Hall*.

Huzoor's first meeting was in the Mahmood Hall with a delegation of Arabs who had travelled from Kababir. There were dozens of people in the group, including both Ahmadis and some guests.

Some of the guests spoke in English, whilst others spoke in Arabic and their comments were translated by either Momin Tahir sahib (*Head of Arabic Desk*) or Muhammad Sharif Odeh sahib (*Amir Kababir*). Though, often the need for translation was unnecessary, as it seemed Huzoor understood the vast majority of what was being said in Arabic.

Many of the guests narrated their emotions at attending the Jalsa and seeing Huzoor. They had tears in their eyes and their voices were filled with emotion. Very lovingly, Huzoor listened to the comment of every single person.

One Ahmadi from Kababir, said that Ahmadis faced difficulties living in Kababir as an anti-Islam sentiment existed amongst some of the non-Muslims. He asked how the Arab Ahmadis should cope with such trials.

Huzoor's response was extremely interesting. His answer epitomised a complete trust in Allah and the need for a person to always count his blessings.

Huzoor said:

“Rather than worry only about your own problems, you should also consider the plight of your Ahmadi brothers and sisters in Pakistan. The Ahmadis living there are treated like third-class citizens at best, there are severe laws that stop them from practicing their faith openly and they cannot hold any Jalsas. Our Ahmadi women in Pakistan can no longer go to the Mosque for Salat or even at Eid. At least in Kababir you can hold such events.”

Huzoor continued by saying:

“Of course, you are also facing some opposition but remember that such opposition was destined for the followers of the Promised Messiah (as) and such persecution is in accordance with the prophecies of the Holy Prophet (sa). Thus, you must face such trials with courage and remain strong at all times. Did the Holy Prophet (sa) stop propagating Islam due to the persecution he faced? Never! Thus, following his blessed example, we must also continue with our Tabligh and Tarbiyyat programmes with wisdom.”

Another Arab Ahmadi said that he had felt as though many ***“miracles had occurred during the Jalsa”*** and that his spirituality had increased a great deal.

He said that waking up for *Tahajjad* and *Fajr* prayers was extremely easy during the days of Jalsa but he feared that upon return to his normal life he would become lazy in such matters again.

In response, Huzoor said:

“There is no doubt that the spiritual atmosphere at Jalsa UK is very special. However, it is now your challenge to take this atmosphere and this feeling of spirituality with you back to your home. For this, you will need to be determined.”

An Arab Ahmadi lady then asked:

“Huzoor – before becoming Khalifatul Masih what was your ambition?”

In response, Huzoor said:

“Certainly, I never had any ambition to be Khalifa! I agree with the statement of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih III (rh) that any person who desires to be Khalifa is not sane because the burden and weight of responsibility on the Khalifa-Waqt is indescribable. My only desire and ambition before being elected Khalifa was always to serve this blessed Jamaat of Allah the Almighty.”

Following the conclusion of the meeting, Huzoor graciously stood for photos with the entire group and thereafter agreed to a request to have photos with each individual family.

Whilst, the photos continued my eyes were drawn to an Arab man, wearing a blue shirt. I saw him embrace Amir Sahib Kababir tightly and as he did he was completely overcome with emotion.

Tears were streaming down his eyes uncontrollably as he thanked Amir Sahib for bringing him to meet Huzoor.

Trinidad delegation

Huzoor's next meeting was with a group of Ahmadis who had come to attend the Jalsa from Trinidad.

Upon being introduced to the Jamaat's National Finance Secretary, who was a local Trinidadian, Huzoor asked:

“Do you yourself set an example for others in financial sacrifice?”

Huzoor's comment emphasised the need for all Jamaat office bearers to personally set a positive example for others to follow and learn from.

Thereafter, Huzoor asked one of the local Jamaat members about his family and he informed that he had been blessed with grandchildren.

Huzoor's response was extremely affectionate. Huzoor said:

“Seeing our young children and especially our grandchildren keeps us young!”

Amir Sahib Trinidad then mentioned that the Trinidad Jamaat was waiting for the day that Huzoor would visit them.

In response, Huzoor said:

“If you want me to come then you should not just ask once but you should send your requests repeatedly.”

Huzoor then asked how far Brazil was from Trinidad and was informed that it was around 3,000km.

Upon hearing this, Huzoor smiled and joked:

“It is quite far and so that is why you came here instead of attending the Olympics. Anyway, our Jalsa is a spiritual Olympics and here the medals are not handed out by a Head of State but by Allah Himself.”

Hearing, Huzoor’s comment, the *National Finance Secretary* responded by saying:

“To get a medal from Allah you need a good coach and surely we Ahmadi are fortunate that we have the very best spiritual coach – who is the Khalifa of the Time.”

Croatia and Macedonia delegations

The next meeting was with guests from Croatia and Macedonia.

A Croatian non-Ahmadi Muslim lady, who was part of the delegation, informed Huzoor that amongst her ancestors were a series of *Huffazul Quran* (those who commit the Quran to memory).

She then asked Huzoor to accept a gift of an early edition Bosnian translation of the Quran. Huzoor thanked her for her kindness but said that she did not need to part with such a precious gift.

In response, the Croatian lady said:

“You are right it is precious to me but this moment, where I am meeting you, is also extremely precious and so it is my heartfelt desire to give this gift to you. Please do accept it.”

Hearing this, Huzoor accepted her gift and said:

“May Allah grant you further and ever deeper knowledge of the Holy Quran so that you are able to ensure that Islam continues through your future generations. May Allah increase the faith of you and your family always.”

Another lady from amongst the delegation informed Huzoor how impressed she had been that Huzoor had presented awards for academic achievements to members of *Lajna Imaillah*. She said she was surprised at how much the Jamaat valued and promoted the education of females.

In response, Huzoor said:

“Islam’s teachings are such that they give great importance to women and girls. It is often alleged that Islam does not fulfil the rights of women, however in truth Islam values women and promotes their rights more than any other religion or belief.”

Addressing Huzoor, a male guest from Croatia said:

“Your Holiness, I attended the UK Jalsa last year and I did not think that anything could top that experience. The kindness and love of every Ahmadi truly overwhelmed me. However, this year was an even greater experience and the love and sincerity of every person I met, from so many different countries, was something I will treasure forever.”

Huzoor replied by saying:

“Our Jalsas are an example of a multicultural society in which people from all backgrounds and ethnicities come together and live peacefully and unite.”

Another lady asked Huzoor why men and women had their own separate areas in our Mosques and at Jalsas considering there was no such segregation during the *Hajj*.

Huzoor responded by saying:

“The Hajj is the height of submission and worship and so during that time people are naturally completely focused upon the worship of Allah and submitting before Him. However, during our normal prayers such standards of concentration cannot always be expected and sometimes people’s attention can be diverted. That is why men and women do not pray side by side.”

Huzoor continued by saying:

“If a plant is grown in the shadow of a large tree then it will not grow well, however if it is grown apart it will prosper and grow to compete and even outgrow the tree! Similarly, Ahmadi women prefer to sit apart and feel more comfortable in such a setting and enjoy their independence. Do not think that we underestimate or seek to restrict women, rather we want Ahmadi women to excel and we believe that Islam creates the best environment for this to happen.”

The lady who asked the question seemed entirely satisfied by the logic and persuasiveness of Huzoor’s answer.

Thereafter, a Croatian guest said he wished to ask an ***“uncomfortable question”***.

Hearing this, Huzoor laughed and said:

“Do not worry – I get asked a lot of uncomfortable questions!”

The guest asked about the allegation that Islam promoted terrorism and extremism.

Huzoor responded by saying:

“Whosoever conducts terrorism is acting completely against Islam and violates the Quran’s teachings. Indeed, where the Quran permitted the early Muslims to fight a defensive war it was to protect freedom of belief

and freedom of religion, rather than to just protect the Muslims. Thus, how could it ever be justifiable for a true Muslim to brutalise or seek to harm non-Muslims? It is impossible!”

A light-hearted comment

As the meeting concluded and the guests left the office, Huzoor looked at me and smiled, before saying:

“Abid – you have heard and seen so much Tabligh today that you will have become Ahmadi all over again!”

As he said this, Huzoor laughed and I also laughed. However, there was truth in Huzoor’s words because hearing the way Huzoor presented the true teachings of Islam and seeing the impact upon the guests was truly faith inspiring.

Nigeria delegation

The next meeting was with a large delegation of Nigerians, the majority of whom were Ahmadis.

Amongst the group was a representative of the Nigerian newspaper *Vanguard* who informed Huzoor that the newspaper would cover the Jalsa Salana in detail.

Hearing this, Huzoor sent a very beautiful message for the readers of the newspaper.

Huzoor said:

“You should always remember that tribes and nations are just a means of identity and recognition. Thus, it is the duty of Ahmadi Muslims in Nigeria to inform their fellow citizens that no tribe can claim superiority over another. The people of Africa must set aside their tribal differences and unite as this is their means to success and without such unity they will never be in a position to compete with the Western world.”



Huzoor continued by saying:

“If the African people understand the importance of unity and fulfill their duties to God then surely a time will come when Africa will lead the world, or at the very least, set the highest standards of wisdom and truth for others to follow. For this you will all have to work hard and then you will see the results, Insha’Allah.”

Greece delegation

Following the conclusion of the meeting, Huzoor met with a small delegation of guests from Greece, who had come to Jalsa on the invite of the Greece Jamaat's *National President and Missionary*, Ataul Naseer, a graduate from the first class of *Jamia Ahmadiyya UK*.

As he entered, I noticed that his beard, which had always been quite thick, seemed even thicker than previously. I was not mistaken, as Huzoor also noticed this and so the first thing he said to Ataul Naseer sahib was:

“Just as your beard continues to grow, you should strive your hardest to ensure the Greece Jamaat continues to grow!”

Thereafter, a journalist from Greece asked Huzoor a series of questions in a formal interview.

The journalist asked Huzoor how it felt to be elected *Khalifatul Masih*.

In response, Huzoor said:

“It felt like a heavy rock had fallen on my head. This is the truth because the responsibilities of the Khalifa to Ahmadis and to the wider world are immense. If you believe in Allah, and believe that he holds those who do not fulfil their duties to account, then the idea of being Khalifa can only fill your heart with fear and trepidation.”

Huzoor's love for the Jamaat

There was also another journalist present from Greece and he remarked that he felt Huzoor looked somewhat tired during *Jalsa* but appeared fresh and rested now.

Personally, I did not like the fact that he had said Huzoor appeared tired and the comment seemed impolite and even disrespectful. However, Huzoor's response illustrated his love for the members of the Jamaat.

In answer to the comment, Huzoor said:

"The days of Jalsa are extremely stressful and I sleep even less than normal because I am constantly concerned and worried about the safety and well-being of every single Ahmadi present. In fact, during Jalsa I receive daily reports about the health of Ahmadis and if anyone has become sick or unwell."

Hearing these words, I felt extremely emotional. It reinforced just how Huzoor is so worried and concerned about the welfare of every single Ahmadi.

Nikah ceremonies

That afternoon, after *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers, Huzoor led several *Nikah* ceremonies at the Fazl Mosque.

One of the Nikah ceremonies was of my cousin Arsalan, the son of my Khala (maternal aunt). He was marrying the daughter of Dr. Nusrat Pasha, a *Waqf-e-Zindighi* serving at the *Fazl-e-Umar Hospital* in Rabwah.

During the *Nikah*, Huzoor mentioned that both families had a long tradition of serving the Jamaat and both Arsalan and his wife were related to the Promised Messiah (as) and so had a particular duty to serve the Jamaat and to follow the example of their forefathers.

Huzoor added that all young Ahmadis should make every possible effort to fulfil their pledge of giving precedence to their faith over all worldly matters.

A few moments with Huzoor

Following the *Nikah* ceremonies, Huzoor returned to his residence for a little while for lunch. However, it was not long before he returned to his office as there were almost 100 family *Mulaqats* in the list that evening.

Just before the family *Mulaqats* begun, I entered Huzoor's office to present my daily media briefing to Huzoor.

Alhamdolillah, Huzoor had been pleased with the media coverage received at the *Jalsa Salana*.

It was a great comfort to hear that Huzoor was satisfied, however I took the opportunity to mention a concern of one of my team members. He had said to me that he was already worried for next year's *Jalsa* as it would be difficult to increase or even merely replicate the coverage received this year.

Hearing this, Huzoor very graciously said:

“Do not worry. Your work with the media is like a fruit tree – some years you will get amazing fruits but some years the yield will not be as good. This is normal. However, in the long-term the tree will continue to grow and prosper.”

Huzoor continued by saying:

“Alhamdolillah, this year many people will have received an introduction to our Jamaat and will have heard of the Jalsa Salana for the first time.”

I took the opportunity to request prayers for my team and for the *Lajna* members who had also helped us this year.

I also informed Huzoor of one journalist who was shown around Jalsa by a member of our Press Team, Basheer Khan.

Basheer told me that the guest had been particularly moved upon seeing photos of the martyrs of Ahmadiyyat that had been displayed in one of the exhibitions at Jalsa.

Upon seeing them he had asked what our Jamaat’s reaction was when our members were persecuted and martyred.

Basheer simply responded by saying ***“Our response is prayer”*** and hearing this the journalist became very emotional.

After hearing this narration, Huzoor said:

“Our faith teaches us to be patient in all circumstances and one of the blessings of this is that our patience elicits the natural sympathy of others when they see our peaceful reaction.”

Huzoor then repeated some couplets of the Promised Messiah (as), which I am unable to remember and even when Huzoor said them, I did not fully comprehend. Nonetheless, it was a very beautiful moment hearing Huzoor repeat the blessed words of the Promised Messiah (as).

Our team had also been following a number of message boards, where hundreds, if not thousands, of members of the public had posted comments in response to the media coverage of Jalsa Salana.

I informed Huzoor that most comments had been very positive, however there were some non-Muslims who had criticised the fact that the Jalsa was segregated.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“Whoever said that we are preaching or practicing Christianity or any other religion? We are preaching and practicing Islam and we follow Islam’s teachings.”

A week to write

Huzoor then mentioned that I should continue to sit in the Private Secretary's office for a few more days and then I would have a week or so to write up my diary before Huzoor's tour of Germany. It was in that moment that I learned that I would have the opportunity to travel with Huzoor to Germany, *Insha'Allah*.

However, as I complete part 2 of the London diary, I am severely embarrassed to say that I was unable to write up the diary in that week Huzoor had given me and, in fact, am completing it many weeks later, following the conclusion of Huzoor's subsequent tours of Germany and Canada.

Though the three days of *Jalsa Salana UK* had concluded, Huzoor's activities would continue relentlessly.

End

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