

**IALSA SALANA UK 2017**

**A Personal Account – Part 1**

*By Abid Khan*

## **Introduction**

In 2016, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) graciously invited me to spend two weeks either side of Jalsa Salana UK in close proximity to him. Just as I had done during Huzoor's tours abroad, I spent time with Huzoor in London, observed some of his activities and met many of the people who had the opportunity to meet him during those days.

I was unsure if this was a 'one-off' or something that I would have the opportunity to do again. Indeed, during the months preceding this year's Jalsa Salana, a number of people contacted me to ask if I would be writing another 'UK Jalsa diary'. I would respond by saying that I was waiting to see if I received any instructions in this regard.

It so happened that during the afternoon of 12 July 2017, as I was leaving Huzoor's office after Mulaqat, Huzoor said:

***"You should write your diary again this year. You can start this weekend at the Fazl Mosque and then from next weekend you should continue this duty throughout the Jalsa period."***

I was, of course, extremely delighted to have the opportunity once again to spend more time with Huzoor and despite, having written a diary last year, over the course of the next few weeks, I was again left amazed witnessing Huzoor's daily routine.

Huzoor's schedule is relentless the entire year but the days around Jalsa Salana UK are even more demanding.

As always, Ahmadis from all around the world had gathered in London and Huzoor met as many as possible individually or as part of Jamaat delegations.

Huzoor met countless dignitaries and non-Ahmadi guests and held various media interviews with journalists from around the world. He held official meetings with Jamaat representatives from different countries, answering their questions and guiding them with love and wisdom.

In addition, Huzoor prepared, and then delivered his addresses, for Jalsa Salana and all the while, he continued with his normal activities, such as reading and responding to the thousands of letters he received each week from Ahmadis around the world. He continued to review all official correspondence from various Jamaat offices and missions and gave instructions and guidance to all.

Furthermore, Huzoor is constantly concerned about the welfare of every single participant of Jalsa and so he took daily reports about which people and groups had arrived and who was still to come.

Further, throughout the Jalsa itself, Huzoor was kept informed about the health and well-being of the members of the Jamaat. Similarly, if there were any issues or problems with the arrangements invariably Huzoor's guidance and prayers were sought.

Whilst, I hope to give readers an idea of Huzoor's activities during the Jalsa UK period, I can never do justice to them and nor will I ever be able to truly portray the emotions of those people who attended the Jalsa and were able to meet Huzoor.

### **A daftari Mulaqat**

This year, *Eid-ul-Fitr* was offered in the UK on 26 June 2017, which meant an interval of one month until the start of Jalsa Salana UK. In the days after Eid, people started to arrive in London from different countries and with each day that passed the numbers increased.

One of the people who came quite early was *Syed Mubashar Ayyaz (54)* from Rabwah, who has been a familiar face at the UK Jalsa for the past few years. After qualifying from Jamia Ahmadiyya in 1987, alongside serving in the Jamaat's *Research Cell* based in Rabwah, Mubashar Ayyaz sahib has been serving as *Principal Jamia Ahmadiyya Rabwah* since 2015.

A few days before the start of this year's Jalsa, I met Mubashar Ayyaz sahib shortly after he had a *daftari* (official) Mulaqat with Huzoor.

Throughout the year Huzoor holds *daftari Mulaqats*, in which he meets officials of the Jamaat from different departments, offices and from the auxiliaries, as well as representatives of the different institutions established by the Jamaat.

Normally it is Huzoor's routine to hold such meetings in the morning and they continue until the *Zuhr* prayers. Such meetings are extremely important as Huzoor gives direct guidance to Jamaat officials and clarifies various issues.

One thing that has always stood out to me is Huzoor's efficiency and this is something Mubashar Ayyaz sahib also noted.

Mubashar Ayyaz sahib said:

***“Whenever I have had the chance to meet Huzoor in a daftari Mulaqat, I present various issues and normally I anticipate that it will take an hour, or at least 30 minutes, to go through the different questions and points that I have. However, my belief and experience is that Allah blesses the time of the Khalifa-Waqt so that what I expect will take an hour is often covered in just 3 or 4 minutes! Furthermore, nothing is left and nor do any questions remain in my mind, rather in that very short period Huzoor clarifies everything and solves all of the problems or worries that I had. Huzoor’s every answer gives full peace of mind and satisfaction.”***

Mubashar Ayyaz smiled and added:

***“Sometimes I run out of things to say and then Huzoor says ‘Aur?’ meaning ‘Anything else?’ and then I am stuck with nothing else to say!”***

Regarding his Mulaqat earlier in the day, Mubashar Ayyaz sahib said:

***“This time, I took 20 points or questions to present to Huzoor and in a few minutes, I was able to take such blessed guidance that will benefit our Jamaat work for years to come. As I left Huzoor’s office, I felt so blessed and joyous and it felt like I had been given a new life – this is how Khalifa-Waqt makes you feel.”***

Another thing that Mubashar Ayyaz sahib mentioned was how sometimes Huzoor’s guidance was contrary to his own expectations. This was something I myself had experienced.

Speaking of one such incident, Mubashar Ayyaz sahib said:

***“Last year, I mentioned to Huzoor that something on the MTA programme Fiqahi Masa’il was not appropriate and I was quite sure that Huzoor would agree with me. However, Huzoor’s answer was different and made me realise that my own thought process was completely wrong and Huzoor’s approach was filled with so much wisdom.”***

As he became visibly emotional, Mubashar Ayyaz sahib continued:

***“Huzoor’s method of guiding and teaching is filled with love and so even when he corrects you or draws your attention to something it increases your love for him.”***

As we continued to sit together, I asked Mubashar sahib if he had any special recollection of Huzoor from before Khilafat.

Mubashar sahib paused for a second before saying:

***“Before Khilafat, I found Huzoor to be extremely quiet, almost silent. If Huzoor was invited to a Jamaat event, normally he would attend but on the condition that some other elder should speak and he would not. How beautiful and faith inspiring it is that he is a person who preferred never to speak until that day when Allah the Almighty commanded him to speak before the entire world. That same person is now the voice of the time, who travels the world in order to convey the message of Allah to the world and surely whoever fails to heed his warnings will suffer gravely.”***

Mubashar Ayyaz sahib told me that during his Mulaqat he had mentioned his desire that a proper biography is published about Huzoor's life. Upon this, Huzoor shared with Mubashar sahib some incidents about the conditions in which Huzoor and his family lived in Ghana in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Mubashar Ayyaz said:

***“I learned what a simple life Huzoor lived and how he always remained content with whatever he had and never complained. Huzoor told me that I should follow this example because, as the Principal of Jamia Ahmadiyya, I should set an example for all the students in Jamia.”***

### **Trust in Allah**

A few days later, I mentioned to Huzoor my conversation with Mubashar Ayyaz sahib and very graciously Huzoor also shared with me some memories of his time in Africa, which exhibited his simplicity and complete trust in Allah.

Huzoor said:

***“When we lived in Africa, our children were very small and so we needed milk for them but sometimes it was not available and finished before I could get more. I remember vividly on one such occasion, the milk was finished and Saboochi (Huzoor's respected wife) was worried but I told her that we will not ask anyone for help or put any burden on the Jamaat.***

***Rather, I said we should do Istighfar because there are great blessings in this prayer and we should leave the rest to Allah.”***

As Huzoor said these words I felt myself becoming extremely emotional. The thought of Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor’s respected wife*) living in such conditions where they were struggling to find the most basic nourishment for their young children was extremely painful.

Yet at the same time, it was a lesson that even as a young man, living in a foreign country and facing hardship, Huzoor never exhibited any panic nor expressed any fear or desperation.

Continuing, Huzoor said:

***“We continued to pray to Allah and to offer Istighfar and as we did, there was a knock at our door later that evening. When I opened the door, I saw an Ahmadi teacher who had travelled from hundreds of miles and was on his way to Kumasi city. He told me that whilst he was travelling it occurred to him that we would be in need of milk for our children and so he travelled out of his way on extremely poor quality and difficult roads. He gave us a carton of milk, which was sufficient for our children for the next few days. Alhamdolillah, Allah had answered our prayers.”***

Speaking more generally of the conditions in Ghana, in which he and his family lived, Huzoor said:

***“In Africa, there was a shortage of food and so Saboohi (Huzoor’s respected wife) would have to improvise and we would eat curries***

***without any meat or vegetables. For example, white beans were available and so we would grind them and make a stock by adding water and some salt or spices.”***

Huzoor told me these stories with a smile on his face and, rather than look back at that period with any sadness at the difficulties he and his family had faced, Huzoor looked back with happiness at how Allah had fulfilled all their needs.

### **Emotions of Ahmadis**

A great blessing of Khilafat is the certainty and reassurance that *Khalifa-Waqt* imparts in the hearts of Ahmadis. In this regard, one person I met was *Samir-ud-din Ali Khan (35)* who had been living in Dubai for some years.

Speaking of meeting Huzoor a few days before the Jalsa, Samir said:

***“Before today’s Mulaqat, I was extremely nervous because I had two specific questions regarding my life for which I needed Huzoor’s advice. For the past seven months, I had thought over and over again about how to tackle these issues because both had the potential to have a big effect on my life. When I presented them to Huzoor he answered them in just a few seconds in the most perfect way and it feels like an incredibly heavy weight has been lifted from my shoulders. It is amazing that Huzoor responds with a smile and very informally and yet when you think about his actual words you realise how much wisdom there is in them.”***

Another person I met was a young student, *Shahrukh Khan (23)* from New York, who was spending the summer doing an internship at Oxford University.

Shahrukh said:

***“Ever since I was a child, I have listened to Huzoor’s sermons and considered him to be my role model but meeting him in person has taken my love and understanding of Khilafat to a whole new level. I feel a spirituality that I have never felt before. I feel an awakening in my heart because I have met the holiest person in the world today.”***

As our meeting ended, Shahrukh said:

***“Growing up in the West is difficult and we face a lot of challenges and obstacles that can take us away from our faith but Khilafat is a shield that shows us that worldly things are distractions and we should focus on our faith. Huzoor encourages the youth by showing us that Islam does not restrict us but encourages us to excel, whilst channelling our passions in a positive direction. For example, when I asked Huzoor’s guidance about my future studies, he was not at all rigid and encouraged me to pursue those subjects about which I am passionate.”***

Another person I met in the run-up to Jalsa was *Yusuf Sayed (51)* from New Jersey in the United States.

Speaking after meeting Huzoor after a period of five years, Yusuf sahib said:

***“I can’t speak and can’t breathe! I am speechless! The feeling of spirituality that emanates from Huzoor is unlike anything else.”***

With words, I am unlikely to forget, Yusuf sahib continued:

***“Without doubt, Khilafat has saved me! If I was not an Ahmadi, I think I would be the world’s biggest terrorist. I am not joking but am very serious. There are so many frustrations in the world, especially for immigrants and there are so many things that can make you restless or lead you to the wrong track. And so, I am the luckiest person in the world that I have been saved and rightly guided by Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya.”***

### **A faith inspiring narration**

Another person I met in the run-up to Jalsa Salana was *Mahmood Ahmad Malhi* (27), a young Missionary who had graduated from Jamia Ahmadiyya Germany and was now posted in Cologne.

During, Huzoor’s recent visits to Germany I had seen Mahmood sahib on a few occasions but had never spoken with him. However, this time in London he approached me himself before his Mulaqat with Huzoor and sought my advice.

He told me he had been very effected by an incident I had narrated in a previous diary about an Ahmadi lady in Germany who had sought Huzoor’s

prayers for her children. I wrote about how Huzoor told me to tell her that he had prayed for her throughout the night.

In this regard, Mahmood sahib asked me if it would be appropriate for him to ask Huzoor to pray for him and his family in the same way.

In reply, I said:

***“I never asked Huzoor exactly what he meant but I do not think Huzoor’s comment meant that he prayed constantly throughout the night only for that lady. Rather, I think he meant that he prayed for her at different times that night.”***

Later, as Mahmood sahib came out of Mulaqat, I asked him if he had requested Huzoor’s prayers in the way he planned.

In reply, Mahmood Malhi sahib said:

***“I did ask Huzoor to pray for me like the lady he had prayed for and in reply, Huzoor said that the meaning of praying all night meant that he will have prayed at various stages of the night for that individual and it did not mean that he only prayed for her during the night. Anyway, when I asked Huzoor to pray for me in the same way he did not say anything but he smiled.”***

Thereafter, Mahmood sahib narrated an incident that I found to be extremely captivating and faith inspiring.

He told me that when he started at Jamia many years ago, one of his classmates, *Arsalan*, who was also one of his best friends, wrote to Huzoor asking what the ‘*secret to success*’ in Jamia was.

Rather than responding that he should work hard or by giving educational tips, Huzoor wrote back simply with the words:

***“The secret to success is that you are punctual in offering Namaz.”***

Mahmood sahib told me that after receiving this response, Arsalan took Huzoor’s words to heart and was always one of the first people sitting in the Mosque for each prayer and continued this practice throughout the seven years of Jamia.

Continuing the story, Mahmood sahib said:

***“After a few years, our Jamia college moved to its current purpose-built site in Riedstadt and Huzoor came to inaugurate it. On that occasion, all of the Jamia students and teachers were seated in front of Huzoor. I was seated next to Arsalan and with great fervour and emotion he prayed that ‘O Allah, if you truly exist then please make Huzoor remember me at this time.’”***

Mahmood sahib continued:

***“Literally a few seconds after Arsalan prayed this, Huzoor called out from the stage ‘Arsalan kahan hain?’ meaning ‘Where is Arsalan?’. In a state of shock, Arsalan stood up, Huzoor looked in his direction and then told***

*him to sit down again without saying anything else. I am witness to this amazing and faith inspiring incident. I do not think it is likely that if other people pray that Huzoor should call them instantly that Allah will answer their prayers in the same way. Rather, I believe because my friend took Huzoor's advice to be punctual in prayers so seriously that on this occasion Allah rewarded him by answering his prayer there and then."*

### **A Welsh convert**

One of the people to meet Huzoor during those days for the very first time was an elderly Welshman called *Ashley Howell Thomas (77)* from Cardiff.

Ashley sahib had converted to Ahmadiyyat in 2016 and so I asked him how he had come to accept Islam.

Ashley sahib said:

*"I always considered myself to be quite a spiritual person and I was heavily involved in Church activities and most of my friends were linked to the Church. However, one thing I struggled with was the concept of Jesus, peace be upon him, having the status of God. This was something I could not reconcile and caused increasing doubts to enter my mind as I grew older."*

Ashley sahib continued:

*"A couple of years ago, I came across some Ahmadi Muslims who were preaching at a stall in Cardiff and I was immediately impressed by how*

*friendly and warm they were. They were against all forms of religious hatred or division and this really appealed to me. Over the next few weeks and months, I studied Islam and I found that in all aspects of life it provided what I considered to be an 'ideal' solution. At a time when there is a lot of prejudice and hatred against Islam, I read the book 'Life of Muhammad' and was so impressed by the character of the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him)."*

Ashley sahib told me that after a few months he had accepted Islam in his heart but had not decided which sect of Islam to align with, as he was also in contact with some non-Ahmadi Muslims.

Ashley sahib said:

*"Initially, I was confused about which Mosque to attend but soon I realised that Ahmadis were the most open-minded and tolerant of all the Muslims and their answers were the most logical. Now, a year later, I have no regrets and am confident I made the right choice."*

Ashley sahib continued:

*"I do feel disappointment that there is some hostility towards Ahmadis from other Muslim groups. For example, one day I was in a taxi with a Muslim driver and he condescendingly asked me why I was going to the Ahmadiyya Mosque. In reply, I told him that my purpose is to serve God and I believe the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be the Messenger of Allah and this is my priority. When I gave him this response his attitude softened and he became much more friendly!"*

Ashley sahib told me about his first meeting with Huzoor and how he had been given a Muslim name by Huzoor.

Ashley sahib said:

***“Meeting Huzoor was extremely reassuring and more than anything I felt secure in his presence. I was surprised at how genuine and humble he is! I also feel very lucky because I asked Huzoor for a Muslim name and so he named me ‘Nasir’. It is a really beautiful name and one I feel very happy with.”***

### **Meeting with Australian MP**

On 19 July 2017, despite being extremely busy preparing for Jalsa and meeting the Ahmadis who had travelled to meet him, Huzoor also met with Kevin Connolly, a *Member of Parliament* from New South Wales, Australia and his wife. The meeting took place at 1-pm and lasted for around 40minutes.

One quality I have witnessed in Huzoor is how he never forgets any kind gesture made by others, no matter how small. For example, when Huzoor visited Japan in 2015, he was hosted for a meal by a Japanese businessman, Mr. Sato, who had become well acquainted with the Jamaat. A few months later, Huzoor became aware that Mr. Sato was visiting London and so personally invited him for dinner and spent a great deal of time with him.

In a similar vein, when Huzoor visited Australia in 2013, he was received at the airport by Kevin Connolly MP, even though Huzoor’s flight arrived in the

very early hours of the morning. Upon this, Huzoor expressed his gratitude to Mr. Connolly and even expressed his embarrassment that he had woken so early to come to the airport.

Upon his arrival at the Fazl Mosque, I received Mr. Connolly and talked to him for a few minutes before his meeting with Huzoor. He told me he was on a personal holiday with his wife but had desired to meet Huzoor, even if only for a few minutes.

Later, when the meeting concluded, he expressed his surprise that Huzoor had met him and his wife for 40minutes, when he had expected only have five to ten minutes. In my heart, I was quite sure that the reason Huzoor had given Mr. Connolly so much time was not because of his status as a Parliamentarian but because Mr. Connolly had come to the airport and received Huzoor in the middle of the night in 2013.

During the meeting itself, Huzoor and Mr. Connolly spoke of the increasing threat of terrorism in the world.

Speaking about the recent spate of terrorist attacks in London, Huzoor said:

***“Despite the attacks, I am glad to say that the situation in London remains calm, however, we are now at a stage that it cannot be said that any part of the world is safe from the threat of terrorism and extremism. Even in Australia, there are risks and so you must stay vigilant.”***

Huzoor explained how the Jamaat was seeking to portray the true message of Islam and so whenever there were any terrorist incidents or attacks,

Ahmadis would go to the scene to offer their sympathies and to speak to the media to condemn the atrocities that were taking place.



Regarding this, Huzoor smiled and recalled a cartoon recently published in an Australian newspaper. Huzoor said:

***“When our Ahmadi youths went to offer their sympathies after the recent attacks in London some of them were wearing T-shirts bearing the message ‘I am a Muslim, ask me anything’ and these T-shirts were shown in the media. As a result, I recently saw a cartoon in an Australian newspaper in which it showed a Muslim youth wearing this T-shirt being approached by a non-Muslim lady. However, the question she asked was not about his faith but whether or not he was good at tennis!”***

Mr. Connolly informed Huzoor that the area where our Baitul Huda Mosque was located in Sydney had developed a lot over the past few years.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

***“Such development is not unique to our Mosque in Sydney. In fact, when this land for the Fazl Mosque was identified our Missionary in London wrote to our Second Khalifa saying that it is too far from the centre of London. In reply, the Second Khalifa said he should not worry and that the city will come to reach the Mosque and over the years this has come true, as London has expanded and developed.”***

Mr. Connolly informed Huzoor that he continued to serve as a Member of Parliament in New South Wales.

In response, Huzoor said:

***“Our belief is ‘once a friend, always a friend’ and so we will always invite you to our events and consider you our friend whether you are an MP or not.”***

Upon being asked by the MP what his ‘priorities’ for the Jamaat were, Huzoor said:

***“We are passing through very challenging times where terrorism is being conducted in the name of Islam and so our priority is to show the world what Islam truly is and to spread its real and peaceful teachings. The fears of non-Muslims are to some extent rational because of the***

***terrorism perpetrated in different countries but they must also remember that the extremists are in a tiny minority and that the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful.”***

In reply, Mr. Connolly said:

***“It is wonderful to see how this message of peace and the rejection of all extremism is coming from within Islam through your leadership. You and your community are showing us that Islam is a means of peace at a time when this message is needed urgently.”***

As the meeting concluded, Mr. Connolly asked Huzoor his views about US President Donald Trump.

Again, Huzoor smiled and said:

***“I think President Trump does not believe in traditional diplomacy!”***

As Huzoor said these words, I thought to myself how astute and true Huzoor’s analysis was and how in just a few words he had highlighted an issue which was causing headaches for world leaders and governments across the world!

### **70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence**

During the days around Jalsa, I continued to meet Huzoor in the afternoon in his office daily. Despite, having a list of Mulaqats that was increasing by the

day, Huzoor still took the time to listen to whatever I had to present and to answer any questions I had.

For example, one afternoon, I mentioned to Huzoor that some journalists had asked us our Jamaat's view on the *Partition* of Pakistan and India, given that the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary was fast approaching. I had particularly been asked if Ahmadis regretted supporting *Partition* given that our Jamaat had been persecuted for many decades in Pakistan.

In response, Huzoor said:

***"It is true that we Ahmadis are subject to cruelties and injustice in Pakistan but we also firmly believe that one day this persecution will come to an end."***

Huzoor continued:

***"The Founder of Pakistan, Qaid-e-Azam accepted Ahmadis as Muslims and desired for a State in which all people would have religious freedom and so he was fully supported by Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra). However, even at that time, Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) knew that eventually, Ahmadis could themselves become a target for persecution in Pakistan but that did not stop him from supporting its creation."***

Huzoor further said:

***"Rather, Hazrat Musleh Maud's (ra) objective was for all Muslims to acquire freedom and so he supported the movement for the creation of***

***Pakistan, despite the potential risks for Ahmadis. Hence, we will never say that the decision to create an independent Pakistani State was wrong or something that we regret. Instead, we continue to have full trust in Allah the Almighty that one day all Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan will be free to practice their faith openly and without any fear of persecution."***

As Huzoor said these words I felt emotional and inspired at the same time.

What really struck me was how Huzoor said that Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) understood that ultimately Ahmadis could be targeted by the Pakistani Government and clerics, yet for the greater good of the Muslims he was willing to make that sacrifice.

Similarly, Huzoor's comment that a day will come when our Ahmadi brothers and sisters will be free from persecution illustrated his complete trust in Allah the Almighty.

### **A few moments with a friend**

A few years ago, a young English man called *Jonathan Butterworth (31)* accepted Islam and entered the fold of the Promised Messiah (as). With the *Grace of Allah*, Jonathon is now serving as a *National Amila* member in the UK, responsible for the training of new converts and is also a *Board Member of MTA International*.

On 22 July 2017, I sat down with Jonathan in an MTA office at the *Fazl Mosque* and he told me about his journey to Islam. Jonathan had recently been

blessed with a second child, who he had just taken with his wife and elder child to meet Huzoor.

During our meeting, Jonathan became overcome by emotion, as he narrated his personal relationship with *Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya* and to see a British born, highly educated young man so emotional and so in love with Islam was very faith-inspiring.

At a time when Islam is being demonised and misrepresented across the world, the transformation Jonathan described in himself was a sign of how true Islam bestowed only peace and security.

As we sat together, Jonathan told me his father was a Christian, whilst his mother was agnostic. At school, Jonathan would attend chapel three times each week and would pray and sing hymns in the choir but all the while he did not have a real belief in God. However, as he matured into his late teens and adulthood he felt a need for spirituality which led him initially towards Buddhism. Thereafter, in 2004, whilst studying at King's College in London, he became friends with an Ahmadi Muslim called *Qudsi Rasheed* who talked to him about Islam and Ahmadiyyat. As the friendship developed, Jonathan became more and more interested in Islam.

Speaking about a major turning point in his life, Jonathan said:

***"In 2010, I attended the UK Jalsa Salana for the first time and that experience had a profound effect on me and I was shaken and moved by the experience to the extent that it was during the Jalsa that I firmly came to accept and believe in the existence of God. Once I came to this***

***realisation I wanted to know how I could become closer to my Creator. This was the first stage of my belief."***

Jonathan continued:

***"I continued to pray and to read the Holy Quran, as well as the Bible and the scriptures of other major religions as well. I also started to read the English translated books of the Promised Messiah (as) and what struck me was how he said that all religions were from Allah. This point was unique and beautiful.***

***In December 2010, I came to the realisation that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) was the true messenger of Allah and this was the second stage of my belief. The third and final stage of belief occurred in July 2011 when I accepted the claim of the Promised Messiah (as) and did Bai'at. At each stage, I felt that Allah Himself was changing my heart and I saw dreams that guided me to Islam Ahmadiyyat."***

Jonathan told me that during his initial period as an Ahmadi he still considered the idea of having a religious leader as somewhat challenging.

Jonathan said:

***"The biggest challenge for me in accepting Ahmadiyyat was the 10<sup>th</sup> condition of Bai'at. To obey God is one thing but to pledge to obey a human being, as we are asked to do in the 10<sup>th</sup> condition, is something else entirely."***

Jonathan continued:

***“I distinctly remember that one day, shortly after doing Bai’at, I listened to Huzoor’s Friday Sermon and at the start of the sermon, I felt as though Khilafat was very distant from me.***

***However, during the sermon, Huzoor spoke of the experiences of some converts to Ahmadiyyat and each incident increased my faith and as I listened I felt a change in my heart that was happening beyond my control.***

***There and then I bowed down before Allah in prostration and wept before him, as I felt a surge of love for Khilafat enter my heart. That was the moment when I realised that Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya truly was a Divine institution.”***

As Jonathan shared this very personal story with me, he broke down in tears and each time he wiped away his tears, more would flow from his eyes.

After a few moments, Jonathan composed himself to an extent and said:

***“I have been lucky to meet Huzoor and to listen to him on many occasions and in the early days, I sometimes tried to see if I could find any weaknesses or flaws in his character. Yet, all I ever found were the highest standards of morality and Huzoor has only ever given me a sense of complete peace.”***

Jonathan continued:

***“My love for Khilafat is not, God forbid, any form of shirk (associating partners with God). We know that Huzoor is a human being but at the same time, I believe that he has been sent by Allah Himself as a sign for us of God’s existence and as a means for us to become closer to Allah.***

***I still remember my first proper Mulaqat with Huzoor after I did Bai’at and during that meeting, Huzoor told me our faith was like a never-ending journey through a vast ocean and so there always remained scope to become closer to our Creator.”***

As our meeting ended, Jonathan shared some personal memories he had of his experiences with Huzoor.

Jonathon said:

***“When I first became Ahmadi, I used to sit often in a position near the front of the Mosque where Huzoor would see me and I used to smile at him. Later, when I met Huzoor in Mulaqat he said something that touched my heart and filled me with great emotion.***

***Huzoor said that he always saw me smiling at him in the Mosque and he was sorry that he could not smile back but at the same time he hoped I would continue to smile at him.”***

Jonathan continued:

***“Huzoor’s comment was beautiful and profound, whereby he appreciated my gesture but at the same time he maintained the decorum of the Mosque.”***

### **Marriage advice**

The other incident Jonathan narrated referred to his wedding to a Spanish convert, *Marissa (Maria) sahiba*, which Huzoor graciously attended. At the wedding reception, Huzoor was seated to Jonathan’s left, whilst his father was to the right. Jonathan said that whilst they were eating their meal, he was anxious that everything proceeded smoothly.

During this period of anxiety, Jonathan’s father whispered to his son:

***“Can you ask the Khalifa what the key to a successful marriage is because a French philosopher said that the key to marriage is that the husband should be blind, deaf and dumb.”***

Upon this, Jonathan said he would ask Huzoor the first part but would not quote the French philosopher because he did not think it was an appropriate comment to share with Huzoor.

Jonathan turned towards Huzoor and said that his father was asking what was the key to a successful marriage.

Huzoor smiled and said:

***“The key to a successful marriage is that both the husband and wife should be deaf and blind!”***

Explaining his feelings when he heard Huzoor’s response, Jonathan said:

***“When I heard Huzoor’s answer all I could say was ‘Alhamdulillah’! Huzoor had not heard any of the conversation I had with my father and so when I told my father what Huzoor had said he was left completely speechless! Here, I was worried about my father making the atmosphere light-hearted and on the other hand, Huzoor made such a beautiful comment that showed me that there was nothing wrong with laughing or saying something light-hearted. That one comment put both my father and me at total ease.”***

Jonathan continued:

***“That incident showed me that nothing ever phases Huzoor and he always knows how to handle each situation. Later, my father said to me that ‘Jonathan, you are so serious – why can’t you be more like your Khalifa because he is always smiling!’”***

My conversation with Jonathan ended as he said:

***“Before Ahmadiyyat I was nothing and even now I consider myself to be nothing, however at least now I have a purpose in life and where before I was spiritually dead, now I am alive. In our lives, the answer to all our***

***problems lies in Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya, Huzoor is our shining star. The love of Khilafat is like an unstoppable Tsunami that can never be stopped and continues to grow and spread."***

### **A right to privacy**

A few days before Jalsa a photo of Huzoor, taken some time in the 1990s began circulating on the internet. It was a photo of Huzoor with some other men taken at Islamabad in the UK and was a very nice informal photo. However, by its nature, it was a private photo and so I was surprised to see it online.

I had originally first seen the photo when Huzoor showed it to me a few days earlier and so when it subsequently came online I mentioned it to Huzoor. At that point, it had been published by some individual Ahmadis and whilst Huzoor did not seem particularly pleased he did not give any instructions.

However, a day or two later, Huzoor was informed by someone that the official Jamaat Twitter account for *Jalsa UK* had published it.

Upon this, Huzoor told me to tell whoever ran the account to have it removed and so I contacted the people responsible and it was removed.

They said that they had only posted it online after seeing some Ahmadis had posted it. I explained that there was a difference between individual Ahmadis posting things and official Jamaat accounts, because the latter was akin to a '*seal of approval*' from the Jamaat.

The next day, I informed Huzoor the photo had been taken down and that it had been posted by the *Jalsa UK* account on the basis that they had seen that other individuals had posted it already.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

***“Do the office-bearers not have the wisdom to make decisions for themselves? Just because someone else has posted something does not mean that Jamaat has to follow.”***

Huzoor’s point was completely right. The official Jamaat accounts on social media should act as a role model for individual Ahmadis, as opposed to the other way.

The photo itself was very nice and one I am sure that Huzoor liked, given that he had shown it to me himself.

However, at the same time, any person has the right to decide if their image is published, especially where it is in a private setting or historical.

It is sad that some Ahmadis and even office-bearers seek to remove this basic right of privacy from *Khalifa-Waqt* who is our beloved Imam.

Huzoor gives the Jamaat every possible moment of his time and so it is an obligation on Ahmadis to afford Huzoor and his family at least some basic level of personal privacy.

## Experiences of Jalsa delegates

Each year, Huzoor invites members of the Jamaat from Rabwah and Qadian and also from certain other countries, to attend the UK Jalsa Salana as official delegates. Whilst this includes some senior office bearers or Jamaat officials, it also includes general office staff or workers.

Occasionally, people ask why such delegates are invited and whether the cost of inviting people is justified. In this regard, the first point to remember is that the delegates are all invited under the direction and guidance of Khalifatul Masih and so there are undoubtedly blessings and benefits that outweigh any financial considerations

On the one hand, there are senior office bearers who attend and whilst in London, apart from reaping the spiritual blessings of Jalsa, they have the opportunity to meet Huzoor and to take his direct guidance for their offices. They are also able to attend various Jamaat meetings and to learn from the experiences of others and this is in accordance with the objectives of Jalsa Salana, as the Promised Messiah (as) said:

***"Amongst the benefits of Jalsa is the fact that the coming together of the members of the Jamaat will increase the introduction of Jamaat members amongst each other and it will strengthen the Jamaat's contacts with one another."*** (Majmoo'a Ishtiharat, volume 1, pages 340-41)

Further, I have met delegates, who have worked for decades in offices and have never had the opportunity to travel to meet Khalifa-Waqt or to participate in a Jalsa Salana.

Under normal circumstances, they would never be able to afford to travel and so attending the Jalsa is a once in a lifetime opportunity and is something that is cherished and remains a source of pride for their families for generations to come.

Thus, during the days around Jalsa Salana, I took the opportunity to meet some of the delegates and to hear their experiences.

One of the delegates this year from Rabwah was *Tahir Ahmad Shams (37)*, a *National Amila* member in *Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya Pakistan* and also the *Vice Principal of Jamia Ahmadiyya Rabwah*.

I met Tahir sahib shortly after he met Huzoor, which was the first time he had met any Khalifa in his life.

Speaking about his Mulaqat, Tahir sahib said:

***“Seeing Huzoor in person is a completely different experience to seeing him on MTA and I feel as though now I know what life is and that before I was dead. Those moments when I was seated before my Khalifa were indescribable, though they were also tinged with sadness because I kept thinking that I am one of the fortunate ones but there are still thousands and thousands of Ahmadis in Rabwah who are deprived of seeing their Khalifa.”***

Another official Jalsa delegate, meeting Huzoor for the first time in his life, was *Nadeem Ahmad Mubasher (33)*, who served in *Waqf-e-Jadid Rabwah* and *Humanity First Pakistan*.

Moments after his Mulaqat, Nadeem sahib said:

***“I cannot believe what just happened! I feel as though I am living a dream. Huzoor’s face radiates nothing but pure light! I cannot believe that just two days ago I was in Rabwah in my normal routine and now two days later I am in London having just met the person I yearned to meet all my life.”***

Nadeem sahib continued:

***“Let me tell you something very special that occurred in my life yesterday – I was able to pray all five prayers behind Khalifa-Waqt! How fortunate am I! For me, my only desire and my only obligation during this visit is to pray behind Huzoor as much as possible. I try to arrive an hour before the prayer times so that I get a place near the front of the Mosque so that hopefully Huzoor will see me and I can see him from near.”***

I also met a delegate from Qadian, Sheikh Mujahid Ahmad Shastri (39), the Editor of Badr Magazine (Hindi edition).

Explaining the feelings of Ahmadis in Qadian, Mujahid sahib said:

***“In Qadian, we are all desperate that Huzoor comes and blesses us once again. Uncontrollable tears adorn our prayer mats as we pray that Huzoor is able to visit us again. Everything is ready, everyone is waiting and we pray that we do not have to wait long.”***

As Mujahid sahib said these words, I thought how Qadian's desire for Huzoor to visit is actually the desire of the entire Jamaat. Personally, I can never forget Huzoor's visit to Qadian in 2005.

At the time, I was a student and travelled to Qadian for just over a week to attend the Jalsa and each day is imprinted in my mind as though it was yesterday. The way the crowds flocked towards Huzoor and how Huzoor would smile, wave and meet the thousands of Ahmadiis who lined the streets wherever he went. They were truly unforgettable days.

### **Inspection of Jalsa Salana UK**

As per tradition, the inspection and official inauguration of Jalsa duties took place on Sunday, 23 July 2017.

After spending the morning in his office, Huzoor departed from the Fazl Mosque at 3.25pm. The inspection was conducted at three different locations, firstly at the Baitul Futuh Mosque, secondly at Jamia Ahmadiyya and finally at Hadeeqatul Mahdi itself.

At Baitul Futuh, Huzoor inspected the *Langhar khana* (kitchen), the bookshop and various administrative departments, such as those charged with managing Jalsa registration and car passes. Thereafter, Huzoor proceeded to Jamia Ahmadiyya in Haslemere, where he arrived at 4.45pm.

Whilst, Huzoor was at Jamia the heavens opened and the rain thundered down. The duty workers at Jamia had kept a stock of umbrellas and handed them to us as we arrived but the rain was so strong that even the umbrellas

hardly made any difference. Yet, this did not stop Huzoor from conducting the inspection and, so after lifting up his *shalwar* a few inches, Huzoor walked through the Jamia grounds until he entered the Jamia building, where he was greeted by dozens of Arab Ahmadis who raised *naaray* (slogans) welcoming Huzoor.

As the Jamia part of the inspection concluded, several young Missionaries lined up to wave at Huzoor before he departed.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

***“You should offer greetings of salam with your mouth and not just with your hand!”***

This was a lesson for me too because I often have the habit when Huzoor walks past to wave at him, whilst whispering, almost inaudibly, the words ‘*Assalamo Alaikum*’.

### **Inspection at Hadeeqatul Mahdi**

On the way to Hadeeqatul Mahdi, I was seated with Ahmad Bhai (Muhammad Ahmad) from Huzoor’s security team and he told me that it was possible the inspection could be done by car at Hadeeqatul Mahdi due to the adverse weather.

However, with the *Grace of Allah*, and in spite of the gloomy weather forecast, the rain subsided and the sunshine came out by the time Huzoor reached Hadeeqatul Mahdi. The ground remained muddy and wet and so the cars

were ready but Huzoor said he would conduct the inspection on foot as normal.

Huzoor visited the different Nizamats (departments) of Jalsa Salana, spending more time inspecting the *langhar khana* (kitchen), *roti plant* and security arrangements.



As Huzoor walked through the *langhar khana* at each station the duty-workers eagerly presented Huzoor with whatever food they were cooking to taste. Thus, whilst standing up, Huzoor tasted *aloo gosht* (lamb and potato curry), *daal* (lentils) and *zarda* (sweet rice).

A few minutes after Huzoor visited the *langhar khana* his young grandchild *Saad* approached me and said he had noticed that in the *langhar khana* there was a large sign that said '*Jalsa Salan*' instead of '*Jalsa Salana*'. As '*salan*' is the Urdu word for 'curry' we laughingly wondered if this was an accidental

omission or whether those in the *langhar* were trying to highlight the fact that they were cooking a lot of curries!

Huzoor visited the 'stores' department and waved at the duty workers who were lined up to greet him.

At one point Huzoor noticed a severely disabled boy, *Talmeez*, who despite his obvious disabilities was also lined up, sitting in a wheelchair, and proudly displaying a Jalsa '*Muavin*' badge. When Huzoor saw this young boy, he stopped and very lovingly patted him on his cheek.

Witnessing this scene, which lasted no more than 5 or 10 seconds, was extremely emotional. On the one hand, we saw the deep love of Khilafat in a young disabled child, who was clearly suffering from a lifelong ailment, whilst on the other hand, we saw how much love the *Khalifa-Waqt* has for the most vulnerable members of society.

As Huzoor continued to inspect the different departments, he noticed that *First Aid* was positioned next to *Rishta Nata*, which is the department tasked with helping arrange marriages for Ahmadis.

Upon seeing this, Huzoor smiled and jokingly remarked:

***"I think the Jalsa Salana administration has very carefully thought about the positioning of these two departments, whereby if Rishta Nata recommends some poor matches it could lead to people fainting and so that is why First Aid is right there on hand to help!"***

### **Visiting Press & Media exhibition**

Huzoor walked past the various exhibitions that were being set up for Jalsa Salana and as he continued walking I saw Huzoor walk in the direction of our *Press & Media* office exhibition.

Our exhibition was relatively small, certainly smaller than those set up by the *Review of Religions* and *Makhzan-e-Tasaweer*, however, a lot of effort had gone into this year's exhibition. Hence, the fact that Huzoor walked towards our office was a great reward and blessing for the team.

Standing outside our exhibition was a member of my team, who was in-charge of setting up the exhibition. As Huzoor approached, the team member welcomed Huzoor and informed that this year we had added two '*games*' to our exhibition for people to play.

As he said these words, I must admit I was slightly concerned that Huzoor may wonder why we were arranging '*games*' at Jalsa Salana!

One of the games was a giant *Jenga* set, where each brick had different components of world peace labelled. The top brick itself was emblazoned 'world peace', whilst the supporting bricks below had labels comprising different issues highlighted by Huzoor in his various addresses such as 'justice', 'tolerance', 'morality', 'human rights' and many others.

The point of the game was that when people pulled out a brick, the entire set became more unstable and eventually collapsed. Thus, the game was

designed to show how many things contributed to a lack of world peace and made the world less stable.

The other game was a series of statements, such as 'women's rights' or 'religious freedom', where participants were invited to decide if they were 'Islamic' or non-Islamic.

*Alhamdolillah* during Jalsa, both 'games' proved popular but I did ask the team to refer to them as '*educational tools*' rather than games to stay on the safe side!

### **Huzoor's address at Jalsa Inspection**

After the conclusion of the inspection, Huzoor entered the main Jalsa Gah and addressed the volunteers of Jalsa Salana.

During his address, Huzoor said the volunteers and duty workers of Jalsa Salana UK were now very well trained after years of experience and how he had even seen young children doing duties very responsibly.

At the same time, Huzoor reminded the volunteers that they should always manifest the highest morals and never display any discourtesy. Huzoor said that even if their patience was tested or they felt frustrated the duty workers should maintain a smile on their faces.

Huzoor said it was a fact that shortcomings were often highlighted by those who suffered any discomfort or problems. Huzoor said very few people wrote to him to praise the workers at Jalsa Salana, even though most people

had very positive experiences, whilst those who had problems would often write to him with their complaints and the most common complaint he received was in relation to the service of food.



Hence, Huzoor said it was very important that each person was served their meals with grace and kindness and no matter how many times they came back for more food they should never be refused.

Following the formal session, Huzoor attended a dinner with the volunteers of Jalsa before leaving Hadeeqatul Mahdi at 8-pm and returning to Masjid Fazl to lead the Maghreb and Isha prayers. This was in contrast to previous years when the inspection had continued until later so that Maghreb and Isha were offered at Hadeeqatul Mahdi.

I spoke to people after, who had long journeys home ahead of them, and they were pleased it had concluded earlier this time. I was personally glad that Huzoor was able to return home by Maghreb and Isha, rather than extremely late at night as had been the case in recent years.

I am sure there is a good reason why the inspection is conducted later in the day, but it did occur to me that if it was held earlier in the day and concluded in the afternoon with lunch, rather than evening dinner, it might be preferable to people who had to travel long distances home.

Anyway, as I travelled back to my home after the inspection, it truly felt as though Jalsa Salana had now begun.

### **Observing Huzoor work**

On Monday, 24 July, I went in for Mulaqat with Huzoor in the late afternoon as per my normal routine. As I entered, I saw that Huzoor was busy writing on a plain A4 piece of paper placed horizontally on his desk.

I could tell that Huzoor was writing one of his Jalsa addresses and so I remained silent and kept my head down so that I did not disturb Huzoor in any way. As he wrote line after line, I kept thinking to myself how this seemed like a moment where Allah the Almighty was inspiring and guiding Khalifa-Waqt.

After ten minutes, Huzoor put down his pen and for the first time since I had entered his office, he looked up and smiled before saying:

***“Thoughts were coming fresh into my mind and so I thought it was better to continue to write, whilst the words were coming to me.”***

Huzoor asked me about the Jalsa inspection the day before and I responded by saying we were lucky that the rain stopped by the time Huzoor reached Hadeeqatul Mahdi.

Upon this, Huzoor remarked:

***“Even if it had continued to rain it would not have mattered! I would have continued the inspection in the rain as well. Why should a little rain stop us from our work?”***

Huzoor’s words reminded me how most people allow insignificant issues to slow them down or to prove an obstacle but when it comes to fulfilling his duties, *Khalifa-Waqt* does not let anything stand in his way.

### **Meeting an old friend**

As I left Huzoor’s office, I saw *Shiraz Ahmad sahib (50)* who had come as an official Jalsa delegate from Qadian.

For the past 11 years, Shiraz sahib has served as *Nazir Taleem* (Director of Education) in Qadian and is now also the Additional *Nazir-e-Ala Qadian* (Deputy Chief Executive).

Shiraz sahib and I became friends in 2007, when Huzoor sent me and my wife to Qadian for three months. At the time, Shiraz sahib had been serving as a *Waqf-e-Zindighi* (life devotee) for just over a year and I had also just started serving as a *Waqf-e-Zindighi* and so we had something in common from the start.

Another common factor was that, apart from me, Shiraz sahib was probably the only person in Qadian who preferred to speak English and so two or three times a week, I would go to his office and spend time in his company. My abiding memory of those conversations with Shiraz sahib was how he would always talk about Khilafat and quote the words of *Khalifa-Waqt* from different occasions.

Given our friendship, I was happy to meet him after a long time and, with my car substituting for his office, we revived the memories of our old conversations. Just as in 2007, everything Shiraz sahib said related, directly or indirectly, to his experiences with Khilafat.

Speaking about meeting Huzoor a couple of days earlier, Shiraz sahib said:

***“Alhamdolillah, two days ago I had that opportunity to meet Huzoor and it was like experiencing heaven on earth. Huzoor is the living representative of Allah and so to be with him is beyond comparison.”***

Shiraz sahib continued:

***“Before you enter Huzoor’s office you are filled with nerves but as soon as you enter and see the look of kindness on Huzoor’s face all of your nerves and fears instantly vanish like magic! Despite his great status, Huzoor speaks to us like we are his friends and undoubtedly no one can have a better friend than Huzoor because he makes you forget all your troubles and problems.”***

Speaking of his experience of working under Huzoor's guidance and supervision for more than a decade, Shiraz sahib said:

***"Huzoor is extremely encouraging and he motivates us in ways that no one else is able to. His style is such that you want to work even more and to try to improve."***

Shiraz sahib continued:

***"In 2006, Huzoor gave me the opportunity to serve as Nazir Taleem and he wrote me a two-page letter replete with instructions and his expectations of our department. That letter was so comprehensive that even though I was thousands of miles away from Huzoor it was very easy to transition into my new role and it was not as though somebody had just left me to look at the old files and to learn everything myself. Rather, it was as though Huzoor was holding my hand and guiding me at each step."***

In 2007, Shiraz sahib was called by Huzoor to attend the UK Jalsa and he had the opportunity to have his first *daftari (official) Mulaqat* with Huzoor.

Recounting that experience, Shiraz sahib said:

***"I expected that Huzoor would only have a few minutes, yet that Mulaqat lasted for 28 minutes and during that time Huzoor removed, one by one, any lingering doubts or sense of concerns I had. I presented more than 30 issues to Huzoor that day and he clarified each and every one. The***

***guidance I received became a charter for our office, which we have continued to follow ever since.”***

Shiraz sahib continued:

***“Following the Mulaqat, I wrote down all of Huzoor’s guidance point by point and sent the document back to Huzoor for his final written endorsement. I was flying back to Qadian the next day and so before departing, I went to ask the Private Secretary if he could fax me the notes once Huzoor had checked them.***

***I assumed it would take Huzoor some days or weeks to go through them because he was very busy still meeting the guests of Jalsa. Hence, you can imagine my astonishment when the Private Secretary handed me notes back and said that Huzoor had already checked and endorsed them! I had only handed them in the night before and it was a very lengthy document and yet Huzoor had somehow been through them already!”***

### **A gift to India**

Shiraz sahib informed that under the instructions of Huzoor, the Indian Jamaat was providing the means of education for thousands of children and students from deprived backgrounds in all parts of India.

Speaking about the vast project, Shiraz sahib said:

***“Huzoor told me that when he came to Qadian in 2005, he saw that there was still so much poverty in India and that people were struggling to***

*provide education for their children. Thus, he instructed our office to establish a proper system of providing for the education of boys and girls who otherwise could not afford schooling. What a beautiful gift to the Indian nation bestowed by Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya! Already through this scheme, thousands have benefited and some older Indian students have qualified as doctors, engineers and in many other fields. Similarly, there are many small children who are able to read and write and have regular education all through the blessings of Khilafat.”*

Shiraz sahib continued:

*“Through this educational scheme, Huzoor has established a lasting revolution in India, whereby he made it clear that poverty should not be the reason that any child is deprived of education.”*

### **Guidance of Khalifatul Masih**

I was also interested to hear about how Huzoor guided the Jamaat in Qadian and was left astonished as I heard from Shiraz sahib the extent to which Huzoor was directly involved in each Jamaat department.

Shiraz sahib said:

*“Huzoor lives thousands of miles from us but in every matter, no matter how small, we are recipients of Huzoor’s guidance. Honestly, sometimes it feels as though Huzoor’s office remains in Qadian. To be frank, we have stopped thinking for ourselves and send every issue to Khalifa-Waqt because we know there are immense blessings in his every decision. Our*

***heart and mind is Khalifa-Waqt and as far as I am concerned, our only duty is to act as his limbs and implement his decisions.”***

Shiraz sahib continued:

***“Never does Huzoor ask us why we send him so many questions and never does he fail to respond. If we send a letter to him today then without fail we receive the reply, with Huzoor’s handwritten guidance, by the next day.***

***Speaking just for myself, I often send 16 or 17 reports to Huzoor regarding the departments I am responsible for and if ever there is any delay in correspondence it is from our end and never from Huzoor. We are just one Jamaat, and when you consider there are over 200 Jamaats worldwide which Huzoor guides, your mind boggles.***

***Huzoor’s capacity of work is in my view a sign of the existence of Allah because only with Allah’s Help can someone maintain such a relentless schedule and capacity for work. Huzoor has been working 18 or 19 hour days non-stop for over 14 years now and it seems his workload is getting heavier and heavier each year.”***

As our conversation ended, Shiraz sahib:

***“When we send a report to Huzoor seeking his guidance we feel great anticipation knowing that tomorrow it will be returned with Huzoor’s notes and guidance. I cannot describe the happiness and excitement we feel when we get the reports back because it feels like we are having a***

***daily Mulaqat with Huzoor! I am witness to the fact that a revolution is taking place in our India Jamaat because in every single field, whether internal or in terms of public relations or dealing with the media, everything is based on the instructions of Khalifatul Masih.”***

### **Emotions of Ahmadis**

After meeting Shiraz sahib, I went to speak to some other Ahmadis who had the opportunity to meet Huzoor.

One person, I met was *Chaudhry Munir Ahmad*, an 87-year elder, who was serving as a teacher still at the *Nusrat Jahan College* in Rabwah. He had come as an official delegate in what was his first ever Jalsa Salana UK.

Chaudhry Munir sahib said:

***“A teacher in Rabwah has only a small allowance and so I could never afford to come to the UK myself and so it is the pure grace of Khalifatul Masih and the Jamaat that I am having this opportunity.”***

I was surprised that Chaudhry Munir sahib was still working as a teacher and had not yet retired. Upon my enquiring about this, he said:

***“When my mother died, Huzoor was Nazir-e-Ala in Rabwah and he kindly came to my house to offer his condolences. At that time, I was 72 and so I mentioned that perhaps the time has come for my retirement. In reply, Huzoor said since I was a Waqf-e-Zindighi I should be ready to serve until the Jamaat needed me. That was 15 or 16 years ago and I have never***

***asked for retirement since and I feel very lucky to have been able to continue my service. Even today, during my Mulaqat, Huzoor asked me if I was still well enough to continue to teach."***

As my brief meeting with Chaudhry sahib concluded, he turned to me and confirmed my name, before saying:

***"Abid sahib, may God bless you and I pray you are still serving the Jamaat when you reach my age."***

It was a prayer I was extremely grateful for.

Another person to meet Huzoor that day was *Khalid Ahmad (52)*, who was employed by the Jamaat as a full-time driver in Pakistan. He told me that before Khilafat, he had the opportunity to serve as Huzoor's driver on various occasions when Huzoor would visit Sindh.

Khalid sahib said:

***"I cannot express how I am feeling at this moment. When I entered Huzoor's office he recognised me instantly and it felt like I had been transported back to those blessed days when I was able to serve Huzoor."***

Khalid sahib continued:

***"I will never forget the way Huzoor used to treat us with such love and regard. He would never consider himself superior to us and would often eat with us and put food on our plates with his own hands."***

That evening I also met *Aftab Ahmed Patel* (65) who was serving the Jamaat as a local *Muallam* (religious teacher) in a village in Sindh. He was born a Hindu but his father accepted Ahmadiyyat and his son soon followed, whilst other members of their family remained Hindu.

Aftab sahib said:

***“Today, was the most blessed day of my life because I was able to touch the blessed hand of that person whose every Friday Sermon I listen to and which is the means by which I try to live my life. I held Huzoor’s hand for a few seconds and I wish I could hold it forever.”***

Speaking of his experiences since converting to Ahmadiyyat, Aftab sahib said:

***“Most of our family remains Hindu and over the years they have tried to boycott me and cause various problems. However, this never weakened my faith and if anything, it increased my certainty that I had made the right decision. Now with the Grace of Allah, amongst my own progeny are Jamaat Missionaries.”***

Aftab sahib said:

***“I serve in a deprived village of Pakistan where often there is no access to water but it does not matter, as our only objectives are to follow the teachings of the Promised Messiah (as). Thus, we show love to the entire village, whether they are Muslim, Hindu or of any other belief. I try to***

***share with others what Ahmadiyyat has given me, which is peace of mind, contentment and above all the truth."***

### **Huzoor's reassurance**

That evening I also met *Imtiaz Ahmad*, a young Missionary from Canada, who had spent the past few years serving in Ottawa. He told me that recently he received death threats during two phone calls received at his home.

The person making the threats said that his brother had been killed in Afghanistan and so he was now determined to 'take revenge'.

I could see from the look on the faces of Imtiaz sahib and his wife that they had been unsettled by these threats, as anyone would be. Imtiaz sahib said that he had recorded the calls and the recordings were with the police, who were taking the matter seriously.

However, despite the police reassuring them, true peace of heart had been given to them only moments earlier when they met Huzoor.

Imtiaz sahib said:

***"I told Huzoor about the death threats and he listened very carefully before praying that may Allah protect us. Then, in the most beautiful way, Huzoor lightened the mood by saying that I had now been reposted to a different city and so I should be safe! Upon this, Huzoor smiled and both me and my wife laughed and enjoyed Huzoor's kind humour and we felt extremely reassured."***

### **Huzoor's media guidance**

We had reached Tuesday 25 July and I was becoming concerned about a lack of media interest in the Jalsa Salana.

With the *Grace of Allah*, our *Press & Media Office* had a larger team this year and they had been working diligently over the past month reaching out to journalists and media organisations. Certainly, the team had put in a lot of hours but as we got close to Jalsa, there was a sense of frustration at the lack of results.

Hence, that afternoon, during Mulaqat, I sought Huzoor's prayers for our media efforts and informed him that so far, we had not received many positive responses.

Upon hearing this, Huzoor said:

***“Do not worry, there are over 30 journalists coming from abroad and so they will cover the Jalsa even if the local ones are reluctant.”***

With these few words, Huzoor put my mind at ease and provided instant comfort and reassurance in the way that only he can.

Some media outlets had suggested their lack of interest was due to the fact that the Jalsa was an '*annual event*', which we had invited them to in previous years and so they asked '*what was new?*' and if there were specific reasons they should come this year.

When I mentioned this to Huzoor, he said:

***“You should tell the journalists that if they wish to find out whether Islam really is a religion of extremism and terrorism they should come to the Jalsa. If they wish to find out the reality then it is their duty to cover it – put the ball in their court!”***

Huzoor then smiled and said:

***“You can also tell them there will be new things at this year’s Jalsa and that they will only find out more when they come! You should not give all the details in advance, rather you should keep the journalists in some suspense as it might arouse their curiosity!”***

Apart from putting me and my team at ease, Huzoor’s advice itself was extremely valuable. For the next few days, our media team followed Huzoor’s advice when approaching journalists and the response was much more positive.

Several journalists confirmed their attendance, whilst others said that though they could not attend, they would publish reports about Jalsa and the majority fulfilled their promises.

### **Always taking note**

One thing I have noticed during my time serving *Khalifa-Waqt* is that even where Huzoor does not specifically comment on something, he takes note of it.

For example, a few weeks before, I had informed Huzoor of a media story in Sweden, where a woman had stated that there was a need to hold 'women-only' musical festivals because men could not be trusted after a series of rapes and incidents of sexual abuse at recent festivals. When I presented it, I thought Huzoor would take interest in the report, but Huzoor did not say anything.

However, weeks later, that evening, Huzoor brought up the report to confirm the country the story referred to.

Huzoor said:

***"I needed to check as I am going to mention this incident in my address to Lajna at the UK Jalsa."***

Thereafter, Huzoor said:

***"Today, my plan was to complete my Lajna address, however after lunch, I closed my eyes with the intention of sleeping for just a few minutes but I ended up sleeping a little longer than planned. As a result, my speech is not yet ready."***

I was very happy that Huzoor had been able to rest a little longer than planned and in response, I said:

***"Huzoor, it is very good that you were able to rest because when Jalsa comes you are even more busy than normal and have even less time to sleep."***

Huzoor smiled and said:

***“Allah enables me to be refreshed even after just a few minutes of sleep and so there is no need to worry about my rest.”***

### **Not an ordinary holiday**

As I was leaving Huzoor’s office, he enquired if I had met some of the guests who had come to attend the Jalsa and who were staying near Masjid Fazl.

I said that I had not really had time to meet them.

With a serious tone, Huzoor said:

***“If you get a chance, you should ask if they have come to attend the Jalsa or if they have only come to socialise and hold late night discussions.”***

As Huzoor said these words, it occurred to me that perhaps Huzoor had received some reports or had noticed for himself something.

Anyway, it reinforced the point that people who come for Jalsa should ensure that the Jalsa remains their priority and they should seek to use every opportunity to increase in spirituality and become closer to Allah, rather than treating the experience as a normal family holiday.

### **Emotions of Ahmadis**

Later that day, I met *Khalil Mubashar sahib (72)*, the *Missionary-in-charge* in Canada Jamaat moments after he had met Huzoor and he told me about some of his experiences during his long service to the Jamaat.

Khalil Mubashar sahib said:

***“I served in Africa for 24 years and the love for Khilafat and for the Jamaat amongst the African Ahmadis was extraordinary. To give just one example, once when I was the National Amir of Sierra Leone Jamaat, an elderly African Ahmadi came to me and asked me to put my hand on his head.***

***Naturally, I felt very embarrassed but I was moved by his words. He said that because I had recently been to London and had touched the hand of the Khalifa-Waqt, he desired for me to touch his head with that same hand. He said he doubted if he would ever have the chance to meet the Khalifa as he was old and so pleaded with me that I did not refuse his request.”***

That evening I also met with a young Pakistani Missionary, *Shahab Ahmad (27)* who had recently been posted in Tanzania.

Moments after meeting Huzoor for the first time, Shahab said:

***“I had written a while ago to Huzoor that I was trying to learn Swahili and so today, as soon as I entered Huzoor’s office and met him for the first time, he asked me ‘How is your Swahili developing?’ I was awestruck at***

***Huzoor's memory as he receives thousands of letters and yet he remembered mine!"***

Shahab continued:

***"At first going to Africa was difficult and I was worried but I knew that I was going there on the instructions of Khalifa-Waqt and so I would be going with his prayers.***

***This knowledge helped me adjust and settle well. Also, I have already been rewarded by Allah because it was easier to get a visa for the UK from Tanzania than it ever would have been from Pakistan!"***

After being composed throughout our meeting, suddenly Shahab became overwhelmed by emotion. Tears began to fall from his eyes, which he wiped away with his sleeve.

Shahab said:

***"I am emotional because I cannot believe that Khalifa-Waqt knows my name and who I am! I cannot believe that just a minute ago I was stood with Huzoor and how he most lovingly put his hand on my shoulder when we met.***

***The impact of today is that I am ready for any trial and any difficulty for the sake of the Jamaat. My Khalifa has showered his love upon me and so I am ready for any sacrifice for his sake."***

### **An emotional Khadim**

During that week, I spoke to a *Jamia* student from Canada, who I had become friendly with during the preceding weeks.

He told me he had faced some difficulties and struggles during his time at *Jamia*, which continued to trouble to him.

He said he had considered discussing the issues with Huzoor during his *Mulaqat* but had decided against it because he did not wish to be guilty of complaining or of increasing the burden on *Khalifa-Waqt*.

Nonetheless, as he waited outside Huzoor's office he felt a deep sense of frustration and it occurred to him that '*Huzoor will never know the troubles and problems I have*'.

The young man told me that when he entered Huzoor's office, he felt a sense of despondency having made the decision to remain silent.

However, he was left astounded when Huzoor himself said:

***"I know you have some difficulties in Jamia but do not worry because I pray for the young Missionaries like you."***

The student told me that he was left completely stunned because Huzoor himself mentioned all the issues that had been troubling him and it seemed as though Huzoor knew everything already.

The student said:

***“This Mulaqat with Huzoor confirmed to me that Allah the Almighty is above all human superiors, and He informs His Khalifa about the condition of His servants, even when it is impossible for them to tell him. Also, it proved to me that Khalifa-Waqt has the means to wash away all the pain and sadness a person feels in just a few minutes, whereas if all the world’s best therapists tried it would take them many years to achieve the same results.”***

### **Not what it seemed**

On the evening of 26 July, I was very happy, as, during my *Mulaqat*, Huzoor gave me some chocolates to take with me.

As he handed me the packet, Huzoor said:

***“I hope you do not mind but I have already opened it and tried one of the chocolates. They were good.”***

Again and again, Huzoor’s humility leaves a person embarrassed and amazed.

In response, I said:

***“Huzoor, knowing you ate from these chocolates makes them even more special for me.”***

I then left Huzoor's office, and as I walked out, a staff member in the Private Secretary's office handed me a box which he said was a gift from Huzoor for me. I took the gift to my car and was very curious to see what was inside and so rather than waiting until I reached home, I opened it there and then.

Inside, was a bottle of Arab fragrance, which was very beautiful and some small round balls wrapped in a golden wrapper. Upon seeing them, I was very pleased because they looked like *Ferrero Rocher* chocolates and I had not eaten for hours and was very hungry.

Without pause for thought, I unwrapped one of the *Ferrero* chocolates and took a large bite out of it. However, I received a huge shock as it tasted bitter and its texture was more like grainy powder than a chocolate. I knew instantly that it was not edible and spat it out.

It was only then that I looked carefully again at the contents and realised that it was *dhooni*, a form of incense that is heated up with coals and emanates very attractive aroma. Thankfully, I had the real chocolate Huzoor had handed to me himself which I ate to try and remove the bitter taste.

Anyway, I was extremely grateful that Huzoor had remembered me, even at a time when he was so busy and so later that evening I sent a message professing my thanks to Huzoor for the gift and I also informed of how I had mistaken the *dhooni* for chocolate!

The next day, 27 July 2017, was the day before the start of Jalsa and when I entered Huzoor's office for Mulaqat in the afternoon, I could see that Huzoor was extremely busy preparing his notes for one of his Jalsa addresses.

Yet, as soon as I entered, Huzoor stopped his work and looked up at me and said:

***“Abid only you could eat the dhooni (incense)! When I saw the wrapping, I also assumed it was Ferrero Rocher but then I opened the wrapper and the texture was completely different to chocolate! You should always be careful to read what something is before you use it or consume it! Now you should take some Nux Vomica homeopathy because eating incense is dangerous and can be poisonous!”***

Huzoor then smiled and used an Urdu saying which meant that ‘*even educated people sometimes do the most foolish and ignorant things!*’

I have to admit when Huzoor made this comment, I was quite pleased to be included in the class of the educated people, even if I was also being classed in the foolish and ignorant at the same time!

Since the day before, I had been suffering from a severe head cold, fever and my throat was extremely sore. It was really bad timing considering the Jalsa was starting and our duties were at a peak.

During the Mulaqat, Huzoor noticed and asked if eating the incense had made me ill! However, I clarified that I had begun to feel unwell even before I had consumed it.

Huzoor took out some homeopathy, which he gave to me and then also handed me a herbal remedy and some throat lozenges that he kept in his office.

No doubt, as a result of the blessings and prayers of Huzoor, I started feeling better later that evening and by the time Jalsa started I was mostly recovered.

### **Friday Sermon at Jalsa Salana**

With the Grace of Allah, the *51<sup>st</sup> UK Jalsa Salana* begun on 28 July 2017 at Hadeeqatul Mahdi, when Huzoor led the Friday Prayers.



During his address, Huzoor spoke of the responsibilities of the participants of Jalsa Salana.

Huzoor reminded how one year, the Promised Messiah (as) cancelled the Jalsa Salana in Qadian because of his displeasure at the conduct of the attendees at Jalsa.

The Promised Messiah (as) said the participants had treated the Jalsa as a worldly event and were more concerned about their comfort than of obtaining the spiritual blessings associated with Jalsa.

Huzoor said:

***“Here at Hadeeqatul Mahdi all of the arrangements are temporary and so it is not possible to provide the same level of comfort as is available in permanent buildings or centres.***

***Thus, despite the best efforts of the volunteers, there will be some weaknesses and I hope that instead of complaining the guests remember that the volunteers are not their servants.***

***Rather, they are humble people who have presented themselves for the service of the guests of the Promised Messiah. Thus, I hope and pray that the guests display grace and kindness.”***

Nonetheless, Huzoor reiterated the importance of hospitality and in particular the need to treat dignitaries and non-Ahmadi guests with due respect. He said it was the practice and teaching of the Holy Prophet (sa) to show respect to leaders and to fulfil their needs.

Furthermore, there were other guests who came to learn more about Islam and so it was the duty of the hosts to look after them as per the practice of the Promised Messiah (as).

### **Meeting the media**

During the afternoon break and the subsequent break periods during the Jalsa, I spent as much time as possible at our *Press & Media* office and met some of the journalists who came to attend Jalsa.

With the *Grace of Allah*, the Jalsa had a very positive effect on all the journalists who came and many stayed for much longer than they originally planned.

Under Huzoor's guidance, our team was assisted very ably by a team of Lajna, who would take the female journalists to the ladies side and spend a lot of time in discussion with them. Such meetings were invaluable as the journalists saw for themselves that our Lajna were completely unlike the stereotypical depiction of oppressed Muslim women confined to the home.

Rather, they were able to see that Ahmadi ladies and girls were very educated and that *Hijab* was not forced upon them by men, rather they took pride in it.

Similarly, the journalists took interest in the different exhibitions, such as the *Review of Religions* exhibition, which included a replica of the *Turin Shroud*.

As was the case in previous years, the journalists also very much enjoyed visiting the *Roti Plant* and seeing (and tasting) the fresh *rotis* that were being baked continuously.

In our *Press & Media* exhibition, one of the things we had on display was a TV screen playing various clips from Huzoor's addresses and one female Muslim journalist spent a lot of time watching clips from Huzoor's speeches and also talking to different Ahmadis and learning about our teachings.

After concluding her visit, she told us that the experience of Jalsa Salana had a profound effect upon her. She said it had affected her mind and heart to the extent that she was considering accepting Ahmadiyyat and had taken away the book '*Conditions of Bai'at*' to study.

Another female journalist, who had just started her career, said:

***"As a woman and as a guest I feel I was treated with enormous respect and kindness and I was made to feel like my attendance was somehow really important, even though I am not a very prominent journalist yet. The hosts treated me as a valued guest but also as a part of their family."***

I was particularly pleased to hear her comment that she felt as though her attendance was 'important' despite the fact she was not yet a prominent journalist.

When I first started working in the *Press & Media* Office, I believed that we should target mainstream media or those journalists who were more influential but, after some time observing my approach, Huzoor said something to me which was a lesson that has stayed with me ever since.

Huzoor said:

***"I do not care if a journalist has a reach of 25million or 25,000, we should seek to engage with them all. If the message reaches even a few thousand people it is something to be pleased about and so do not disregard the smaller outlets. Even if a journalist does not have any following, at least he or she will have learned the true message of Islam."***

That comment that Huzoor made to me years ago had a deep impact upon my thinking and I have seen great wisdom in following this instruction.

Up and coming journalists, who may not be well known, are often much more receptive. Just as our guest at this Jalsa had noted, they were not used to being treated as ‘important’, and so being treated with respect had a very positive impact on them.

Further, they often spend more time with us and so are able to learn more about the Jamaat’s teachings than more prominent media figures who normally just wish to come and take their story and then move on.

Also, there are some journalists who may not have been well known when we initially meet them but have gone on to forge successful careers and are now well aware of the Jamaat and its teachings.

### **First Session of Jalsa Salana**

At 4.25pm, Huzoor raised the *Liwai-e-Ahmadiyyat* (Flag of Ahmadiyyat) before proceeding to the Jalsa for the first session of Jalsa Salana.

Moments before entering the marquee, Huzoor briefly met the UK’s *Minister of Education*, Justine Greening and Zac Goldsmith MP, who were attending the Jalsa as guests.

During his address, Huzoor spoke about the need for moral reformation and improvement and quoted various teachings of the Promised Messiah (as) in this regard.

Huzoor said that true and sincere love of Allah was selfless and pure, whereby people acted according to Allah's teachings due to their love for *Him*, rather than for a desire for reward. Huzoor contrasted this with extremists and terrorists who conducted heinous acts in the name of Islam.



Huzoor said:

***“No matter what they claim, terrorists have no love for Allah the Almighty and are not motivated by Islam because Islam teaches us to love all of humanity.”***

Later in his address, Huzoor prayed:

***“May all members of our Jamaat prove to be true ambassadors of Islam and true examples of fulfilling the rights of Allah and of mankind.”***

Huzoor also asked Ahmadis to especially remember persecuted Ahmadi Muslims, who were deprived of the blessings of Jalsa Salana, in their prayers.

Following the conclusion of the afternoon session, Huzoor visited the *langhar khana* (kitchen) and the *roti plant* to check the food being prepared for the guests. Huzoor tasted food from different pans and seemed satisfied that the food was being well prepared.

### **Impact of Jalsa**

In the evening, I returned to our *Press & Media* office and met with some more guests.

One female journalist said she was amazed at the fact that men were cooking the food for the women!

She also said she was initially apprehensive about the segregation of men and women but her concerns had been removed very soon. She said:

***“When I first arrived I was worried that men and women were segregated but, after having a tour of the whole Jalsa and the ladies side, I saw that segregation gave the women their own freedom and enjoyment and more importantly it gave them the power to run things based on how they felt best.”***

Another female journalist told us she found the experience of attending the Jalsa to be extremely ‘humbling’.

She said:

***“At this event, everyone was working very hard, being helpful and cooperative and I couldn't believe that they were all volunteers. I never saw a single person or volunteer shout or get angry. If I could ever imagine how a peaceful world would look like, it would be exactly how your Jalsa was and she said this was the only way the world could come to peace.”***

### **Spirit of service**

The weather at *Hadeeqatul Mahdi* that first day was not ideal to say the least. As afternoon turned to evening, the light drizzle turned into heavy rain that lasted many hours and into the night.

I keep a notepad in my hand and because I am often writing it is inconvenient to keep an umbrella and so I was one of thousands of people to get soaked that evening.

Nonetheless, if anything, such difficulties increase a person's enjoyment of Jalsa, if not always at the time, then certainly looking back. I saw hundreds of people doing duty in the pouring rain, many of whom did not have umbrellas or adequate clothing, yet the inhospitable conditions did not deter them in the slightest.

There was a young *Khadim*, originally from Kazakhstan, who by chance I kept walking past as he did security duty at a gate. Whenever, I saw him he bore the widest possible smile and welcomed me with a loud greeting 'Assalamo

*Alaikum'* and there was no sense at all that his duty was difficult or of any fatigue.

There were other people, who were cleaning toilets, a difficult duty in the best of conditions but ten times harder when each person using the facilities entered with wet and muddy shoes. Yet not one of the duty workers displayed any sense of worry or angst, only pride that they were able to serve the guests of the Promised Messiah (as). *Alhamdolillah*, the spirit of service continued to amaze throughout the three days.

### **Huzoor's Lajna address**

On the second day of Jalsa Salana at 12-pm Huzoor travelled from his residence to the main Lajna marquee to address the members of *Lajna Imaillah*.

In the most beautiful way, Huzoor explained the high status of women according to the teachings of Islam and the huge rewards given bestowed by Allah in return for ensuring the good moral training of their children.

Further, Huzoor said that Islam had instructed men to assist women fulfil their duties within the home, however nowhere had Islam placed a responsibility upon women to assist men in providing for their families.

Huzoor also referred to the so-called 'liberal Mosque' opened recently in Germany by a Muslim lady, who wished to open more in other major cities. Huzoor said that such projects were the result of a failure to understand Islam's true teachings and due to an '*inferiority complex*'. He said such

schemes were an attempt to create division and discord within Islam and so were a means to weaken it rather than to strengthen it.

Speaking about the need to stay firm to Islam's true teachings, as opposed to seeking to 'modernise' or hide our religion, Huzoor said:

***"We cannot put our foot in two different boats otherwise we will surely sink and so we must follow Islam's original teachings without any fear or complex."***

### **Constant guidance**

After his address, Huzoor proceeded to the men's marquee to lead the *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers. Before entering the *Jalsa Gah*, Huzoor called the *Managing Director of MTA International* and said that he had been informed that the previous day the MTA live broadcast cut off for some time in parts of Pakistan.

Upon being informed that MTA was communicating with MTA in Pakistan to find out what the issues were, Huzoor pointed out that the *Head of MTA Pakistan*, Syed Tahir Shah sahib was attending the Jalsa and so MTA International should speak to him directly. It was clear that Huzoor was not satisfied that the connection had failed and so people had been deprived of partaking in the Jalsa through MTA for some time.

Throughout the Jalsa, the *Officer Jalsa Salana*, Nasser Khan sahib and Amir Sahib UK, Rafiq Hayat sahib would speak to Huzoor after each session to give

a report of the administrative side of Jalsa and to seek Huzoor's guidance on any problems that arose.

For example, after *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers on Saturday, Huzoor was briefed about the water pressure being weak at certain times over the past 24 hours.

In response, Huzoor gave various ideas and said that if nothing else worked then they should negotiate with the water authorities so that water usage could be increased.

For the sake of the comfort of the guests, Huzoor said that if some extra fees had to be paid it should be done.

That afternoon, I spoke to Amir Sahib about the bad weather, which had caused various problems and difficulties.

In reply, Amir Sahib smiled and said:

***“Huzoor has told us that no matter the weather, no matter the conditions, the Jalsa will always go ahead and take place! Hence, there is no point us worrying about the difficulties, rather it is our objective to make everything as smooth as possible and to try and limit any discomfort to the participants.”***

Huzoor's comment to Amir Sahib illustrated the vast importance of Jalsa Salana.

### **A confusion removed**

Later, Huzoor graced the afternoon session of the Jalsa Salana with his presence and delivered the traditional report highlighting the blessings on our Jamaat during the past year.

Huzoor announced that, with the *Grace of Allah*, over 600,000 people had joined done Bai'at over the past year, the majority of whom were in Africa.

Furthermore, Huzoor also announced that the Jamaat had now been established in 210 countries of the world.

The issue of numbers of countries in which the Jamaat is based is something that has become slightly contentious. During the past year, a few people had approached me asking about this. The people who have asked me have all said that, according to the *United Nations*, there are less than 200 countries in the world, yet our Jamaat is established in a number exceeding this total.

When I mentioned this to Huzoor after Jalsa, he smiled and said:

***“We are not a political group who chooses to ‘officially recognise’ some countries, whilst deciding not to recognise others. There are many Islands in the world that consider themselves independent countries but according to the U.N. or official agencies they are not independent.”***

Huzoor then took a break from the mail he was checking and took out his *iPad*, which was placed on a cabinet behind his desk. Huzoor went to ‘Google’ and typed in ***‘How many countries are there in the world?’***

I stood behind Huzoor as he looked at the results and he showed me how the U.N. had its 'official list' but that there were also dozens, if not more, islands or territories, that considered themselves as nations, even if they were not officially given this recognition.

Huzoor said:

***“Now you can explain to people who ask you this question and if you remind me before next year’s UK Jalsa then Insha’Allah I will also clarify it in my report.”***

It so happened that a few days later I was looking through the *BBC Sport* website and there was an article about an upcoming boxing match. The article referred to the fact that the fight would be televised in ‘over 220 countries’.

Hence, the BBC, which is considered one of the most trustworthy news organisations, also considers many countries that may not be officially recognised!

### **Meetings with delegations**

Following the conclusion of Huzoor’s address, he returned to his residence for a few minutes before proceeding to his temporary office at Hadeeqatul Mahdi.

It was a tent divided into three sections. On one side, was a reception area, in the middle was the Private Secretary's office and on the other side was Huzoor's office.

That evening, Huzoor held meetings with delegations from Greece, Switzerland, Uruguay, Spain, Ireland, Holland and Sierra Leone. The delegations included politicians, dignitaries, journalists, non-Ahmadi guests and new Ahmadi converts.

The Greek delegation included a journalist who asked Huzoor whether it was 'difficult' to spread a peaceful message in the world.

In response, Huzoor said:

***"Our work is to spread the message of Islam and an inherent part of Islam is peace. Today, there is a great deal of disturbance and conflict in the world but that will never stop us from our mission."***

A young guest from Switzerland asked Huzoor why he was referred to as 'His Holiness'. From the tone of his question, it seemed that he perhaps objected to this.

Huzoor said:

***"I have never asked anyone to call me this, rather it is the choice of the members of the Jamaat. Out of their love for their spiritual leader, they desire to show respect, however, if someone was to address me as Mirza***

***Masroor Ahmad I would not take any offence or mind. Certainly, you are free to call me by my name 'Masroor'."***

Upon this, any sense of objection was removed and the guest smiled and said:

***"That is wonderful! Thank you."***

Amongst the Spanish delegation were some national Members of Parliament. One of them informed Huzoor that they were Christians by faith.

In response, Huzoor said:

***"It makes no difference to us what your religion is because we believe that as humanity we are all one. Thus, no matter what a person's belief we should love and respect each other."***

Huzoor continued:

***"There has been a lot of rain and this has caused some difficulties to our guests and for this, I apologise to you."***

The other Member of Parliament said she had really enjoyed Huzoor's addresses and learned a great deal about establishing religious freedom. She added that before the Jalsa she knew very little about Ahmadiyyat but now had a much clearer understanding of Islam and how it was completely different to the media portrayal.

Within the Spanish delegation, there were also some guests from Argentina, including an Ahmadi convert and some Argentinian national journalists.

An Argentine journalist asked Huzoor what the Jamaat's response was to terrorist attacks conducted in Islam's name.

In response, Huzoor said:

***"We always categorically condemn them and make it clear that such attacks are completely against the teachings. I have travelled to different countries to give lectures in which we do not just condemn but we also give solutions to the lack of peace in the world based on Islamic teachings. I have written to world leaders and warned them about the risks in the world."***

Huzoor continued:

***"This very gathering of our Jalsa is also a symbol of how we are showing Islam's true teachings. Here there are thousands of people gathered together for three days and, due to the weather and the fact that this is being held outdoors on a farm, means the conditions can be difficult. Yet, you will only see smiles on the faces of the participants, there is no disorder and everything is conducted smoothly and without incident. This is all a result of Islam's true teachings."***

Following the conclusion of the meetings, Huzoor graced a dinner reception hosted by *Wakalat-e-Tabshir*, attended by dozens of dignitaries and guests, as well as hundreds of Jamaat representatives from around the world.

Thereafter, Huzoor led the Maghreb and Isha prayers and with that, the second day of Jalsa Salana UK had reached its conclusion.

However, where the Jalsa only had one day left, Huzoor's Jalsa activities and meetings would continue for many days to come.

### **End of Part 1**

Any comments or feedback: [abid.khan@pressahmadiyya.com](mailto:abid.khan@pressahmadiyya.com)