

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

A Personal Account

By Abid Khan

Introduction

This year has been unlike any other and, at the time of writing, people the world over continue to be afflicted by anxiety and uncertainty due to COVID-19.

In the past, all diaries I have written have been published as '*personal accounts*' but, where they have included personal incidents, they have also recorded certain Jamaat events or meetings more formally.

This diary though is very much a personal account from start to finish. It does not relate to the instructions Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) has given to Jamaats across the world or the guidance he has given to Ahmadis regarding COVID-19. Rather, it exclusively details personal interactions that I have been fortunate to have with Huzoor during these past few weeks and months.

A virus like no other

Through January and February, I presented daily updates to Huzoor about the coronavirus and after seeing Huzoor's reaction and response, it was clear to me at an early stage that this was no ordinary virus. From the outset, I could see how seriously Huzoor was taking the outbreak, well before it was declared a global threat or a pandemic.

Most Ahmadis will be familiar with the fact that Huzoor prescribed homeopathy medicines for COVID-19 in the very early stages, when the vast majority of cases remained in China or its neighbouring countries.

In a similar vein, I recall how, in mid-February 2020, when the UK was still very much 'open' and restrictions were still several weeks away, I asked Huzoor if our Jamaat events would be affected by the coronavirus.

In response, Huzoor said:

“Yes, it is likely they will be. The Peace Symposium is scheduled for late March but I do not think it will be possible to hold it.”

Thereafter, Huzoor asked:

“What do you think about holding the Peace Symposium?”

Upon this, I most humbly submitted:

“Huzoor, I also thought that it may be difficult, especially, given that guests come from across the UK and abroad. It is also possible that there could be government restrictions on large gatherings by then.”

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“Yes, we would not know where the guests have travelled recently or with whom they would have come into contact and so there is a clear risk.”

In light of this conversation, I was unsurprised when a few days later, the Peace Symposium was cancelled on Huzoor's instruction, even though, at that time, mass gatherings were continuing in the UK.

Precautionary measures

As we moved through March, the atmosphere in England and other parts of the United Kingdom began to change, as we witnessed through our TV screens the desperate struggles and misery of the people of Italy and Spain, where the death tolls were rising at a horrifying rate.

The number of cases in the UK was also rising but still the British Government seemed reluctant to impose the restrictions enforced in other nations.

In contrast, our Jamaat, under Huzoor's direction, continued to take preventative measures. Huzoor spoke about the coronavirus in his *Friday Sermons* and gave clear guidance for Ahmadis to follow.

For example, Huzoor instructed elderly or vulnerable people to stay at home well before any official guidance or instruction from the Government was given.

In terms of our Jamaat office environment, I was personally given detailed instructions from Huzoor about how staff members should isolate themselves at home if they had even the slightest symptoms.

In addition, smaller practical measures were also taken. For example, white sheets that were washed and replaced after each prayer, were placed on top of the carpet in the Mubarak Mosque in Islamabad in order to reduce the spread of bacteria.

A sense of dread

As we progressed into the second half of March, finally, the restrictions announced by the UK Government gradually increased, culminating in a speech delivered by the Prime Minister Boris Johnson on 23 March 2020.

Prior to the speech, all indications were that the Prime Minister was set to effectively mandate a national lockdown.

I cannot deny that I felt impending dread at the thought of the lockdown because I feared it would lead to the suspension of my daily routine of reporting to Huzoor for Mulaqat, something that had been the greatest privilege of my life over the past decade.

During my Mulaqat with Huzoor on 23 March 2020, I hesitantly asked:

“Huzoor, if the UK Government orders a lockdown, possibly from this evening, should I still report to Islamabad for Mulaqat?”

I dreaded Huzoor’s answer and sure enough his response confirmed what I had feared. At the same time, his answer illustrated his piety and adherence to Islamic principles of following the laws of the land.

Huzoor said:

“Yes, if the Government bans travel or enforces a lockdown then you should not come and should stay at home.”

Perhaps seeing the dejected look on my face, Huzoor added:

“Baqi phone par rabta.”

Meaning:

“Apart from that, we can communicate on the phone.”

This comment partially alleviated my sadness, though I did not really understand what Huzoor meant by it.

I thought perhaps it meant that our communication over the next few weeks would be through *text message* or perhaps that Munir Javed sahib (*Private Secretary*) might call me to convey Huzoor’s instructions or guidance from time to time.

Lockdown

I drove home and listened far more eagerly than usual to the address delivered by the Prime Minister to the nation.

Normally, I listen or read statements of different leaders or officials from the perspective of seeing if they say anything noteworthy which I may need to report to Huzoor. However, on this occasion, my foremost interest was to see how the Government’s instructions would affect *my* ability to report for Mulaqat.

As expected, the Prime Minister did announce a lockdown. However, he also said that if it was impossible for someone to work from home they would be permitted to continue to go to work.

When I heard this, my lawyerly instincts, which had remained dormant for the past 13 years, were instantly resuscitated. The first thought that came to my mind was *'loophole'*

I convinced myself that because it was not possible for me to report for Mulaqat with Huzoor whilst working from home, it would not be wrong or unlawful for me to continue to travel for Mulaqat.

However, given the instructions and guidance Huzoor had given me earlier in the day, I knew I could not simply report for Mulaqat as normal the next day. Rather, I would need to seek Huzoor's permission, which I duly sought.

In response, I received the following instruction from Huzoor:

"During this period, come to Islamabad one day a week, the rest of the week stay at home. If I need you for any particular work, I will call you to Islamabad when necessary."

As I read this, I felt a mixture of emotions. I felt sad and sorrowful that my daily opportunity to meet with Huzoor were to be adjourned indefinitely.

On the other hand, I felt relief that, at the very least, I was still permitted to see him on a weekly basis.

A change of pace

The next few days were a complete and sudden change of lifestyle for me.

For 13 years, my every day revolved around Mulaqat. It was the focus of my life. Both my office and family life revolved around Mulaqat timings.

Now, all of a sudden, I was working from home, there was no daily travel to Islamabad, there was no preparing daily notes for Mulaqat.

Instead, in common with millions of others, I was now suddenly thrust into the entirely unfamiliar world of *home-schooling*.

During that week and those that followed, *Google* proved to be a faithful ally, as it helped me navigate my way through the challenges of teaching my elder son.

Truth be told, I quite enjoyed the first two or three days of lockdown.

The weather was extremely pleasant and so I took the opportunity to walk in our communal gardens every afternoon as the sun shined from the cloudless skies above.

Furthermore, though I missed seeing Huzoor desperately, I did not miss the heavy traffic I often encountered whilst travelling to and from Islamabad.

Soon though I was impatiently yearning to report to Islamabad once again.

A different atmosphere

Most graciously, Huzoor had left it to me to choose which day I would come to Islamabad each week and so I decided upon Friday.

Having last met Huzoor on Monday, I was excited and joyous when on Friday, 27 March I travelled to Islamabad. Though my Mulaqat was not until the evening, out of sheer anticipation and excitement, I drove to Islamabad in the morning.

Despite my happiness at the prospect of seeing Huzoor, I felt sad that he was not able to deliver his *Friday Sermon* due to the lockdown restrictions and instead he delivered a live message from his office.

More generally, I was shocked to see how noticeably the atmosphere in Islamabad had changed in just three or four days since my last visit. Though precautionary measures, such as temperature checking, had been taking place for some weeks, now I had my temperature checked on three separate occasions before I was permitted entry into the main compound.

Islamabad seemed eerily quiet. I did not see anyone on site who did not live in Islamabad, except for a few members of the MTA team. Most of the residents of Islamabad stayed within the four walls of their home at all times.

Every person I encountered, including Huzoor's office staff, were wearing a face mask. I did not have a mask myself and so felt exposed and uncomfortable and so the first thing I did was to find one.

To my surprise, I was told that *Khuddamul Ahmadiyya* had privately sourced some coronavirus tests and that several office staff had taken the test in the past couple of days. I asked if I could also be tested and was relieved when the test result came back as negative.

At around 6.30pm, *Alhamdulillah*, I was once again able to meet Huzoor, to present my report and to spend time in his blessed company.

I was pleased when Huzoor said:

“Even though I had said you could come on any day, I thought the best day for you to come would be on Fridays.”

In line with the government guidelines, the chairs opposite Huzoor’s desk were now placed further away to maintain a safe distance. I was also glad I had procured a face mask because I soon realised that it was on Huzoor’s instruction that people in Islamabad were now all covering their faces.

During the Mulaqat, my mask slipped below my nose on a couple of occasions and each time, Huzoor alerted me and said I should pull it up. He also showed me how to ensure it fitted around my face securely to ensure better protection.

Following the Mulaqat, I left Islamabad with a sense of sadness, even grief, that I would not see Huzoor for a week. I tried reminding myself that there were so many Ahmadis who were unable to ever meet Huzoor and so I should continue to thank Allah and to be grateful for His blessings, rather than to unnecessarily wallow in my own change of circumstances.

Friday Sermon in an Empty Mosque

On 3rd April 2020, I travelled to Islamabad and reported for Mulaqat. The week before, Huzoor had been unable to deliver his *Khutba* due to the COVID-19 lockdown. However, after consultation with some Ahmadi lawyers, Huzoor took the decision to resume his weekly Friday Sermon.

It was certainly a relief to members of the Jamaat to see and hear Huzoor's sermon through MTA once again.

Due to the government stipulations, the sermon had to be delivered in an empty Mosque in which the only people present, apart from Huzoor, were the *Muezzin* and an MTA cameraman.

As I watched the sermon from my home, I thought of how strange it must have been for Huzoor to speak to an empty Mosque.

So, upon entering his office, I asked Huzoor if he had found it upsetting or difficult to deliver his sermon in this different way.

Smiling, Huzoor said:

"It was not difficult at all! I just looked in the direction of the Muezzin or the cameraman and treated it like any other sermon!"

I mentioned that some Ahmadi lawyers were of the opinion that Huzoor could have delivered his sermon the week before on 27 March 2020, rather than delivering a message from his office.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“Yes one or two lawyers gave their opinion to me that there was nothing to stop me delivering my sermon on 27 March, as long as only one or two people were present in the Mosque. However, I decided it was not appropriate to deliver a sermon last week due to the sensitivities at that time.”

I also took the opportunity to mention that someone had asked me how the challenges and consequences of the coronavirus pandemic were affecting Huzoor’s personal spirits.

Appearing surprised that this question had even been asked, Huzoor said:

“Do I look down or depressed? Of course there is sadness at the loss of life and the trials faced by people but we have trust in Allah and so there is no sense of frustration or depression.”

As I left Huzoor’s office, I presented him with the third and final part of a personal diary I had written about Huzoor’s tour to Europe in September and October 2019. Huzoor graciously said he would review it when he had some time.

An unexpected call

The following evening, 4 April 2020, at around 7.30pm, as I was sitting in our lounge with my children, I received a phone call from the Private Secretary’s

office. To my complete surprise, a Missionary serving in the PS Office, Ghalib Javaid, informed me that Huzoor wished to speak to me.

I had no idea for what reason Huzoor was calling and those five to ten seconds from when Ghalib informed me to when the phone was connected were spent in a state of panic and confusion.

I jumped up from the sofa, frantically gestured to my wife and children to remain quiet and ran to my bedroom trying desperately to compose myself.

After a moment's pause, I heard Huzoor's voice on the other end of the phone.

Huzoor said:

“Assalamo Alaikum, kya haal hai?”

That:

“Assalamo Alaikum, how are you?”

My voice quivered. I had spoken to Huzoor on the phone a handful of times and each time had found the experience extremely nerve wracking.

When I have the opportunity to meet Huzoor in person, I have time to prepare and to compose and ready myself. Yet, whenever I have spoken to Huzoor on the phone, it has been sudden and unexpected.

Immediately, Huzoor mentioned that he had already checked the *diary* and that there were some corrections needed. I was taken aback that Huzoor had completed the diary so soon, as it was well over 100 pages long.

Huzoor said he had marked the corrections in pencil and that Ghalib would scan and email me the notes. However, in case I did not understand the written notes, he had called to explain them over the phone.

Huzoor said to get a pen or pencil and so I looked in the room frenetically not wishing to waste a moment of Huzoor's time.

Knowing my personality, Huzoor said:

"Take your time, there is no need to rush!"

I went to the lounge and found a pen and an old envelope, which I brought back to my room and informed Huzoor that I was ready.

Over the next ten minutes, Huzoor identified several errors in the text I had submitted.

For example, Huzoor referred to a section I had written about Hazrat Musleh Maud's (ra) command and understanding of the English language.

Huzoor informed me I had written up the incident inaccurately and he then very patiently explained the whole story again.

I was extremely grateful and relieved that Huzoor had corrected me because when I re-read what I had originally written, I realised it was not only misleading but also had the potential to be taken out of context and to reflect wrongly on the pure character of Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra).

After correcting and clarifying a few further points, Huzoor referred to the fact I had mentioned that some Ahmadis from Bremen Jamaat in Germany had gathered on a bridge to wave at Huzoor from above, as the Qafila proceeded on the motorway.

Huzoor said:

“You have written that you are not aware if I saw the Ahmadis on the bridge, in fact I did notice them and so you should mention that as it will make them happy.”

Upon this, I said:

“Huzoor, in the diary I have written that I thought it was unnecessarily dangerous for them to stand on the bridge, as they could be a potential distraction. Should I remove this comment?”

Huzoor said:

“No keep your personal opinion. Where they will be happy to know that I saw them, they will also consider the safety aspect.”

Before the call concluded, Huzoor said:

“These days are you helping Mala with the cooking and cleaning?”

I said I was helping with the cleaning but not so much with the cooking, for I did not wish to put my family through the ordeal of eating the food I had prepared!

I took Huzoor’s question as an indication that I should assist my wife Mala as much as possible, given we had a new-born and two young boys in the house.

Thus, over the next couple of weeks I did cook occasionally. My children loved my cooking but both Mala and I found it somewhat less palatable!

After Huzoor said ***“Allah hafiz”***, I put the phone down and felt incredibly grateful and emotional to have had the chance to speak to Huzoor so unexpectedly.

A middle name

A couple of days later, I received a call from Munir Javed sahib and was informed that Huzoor wished to speak with me. Just like the previous time, I was not expecting the call and was completely unprepared.

After asking how I was, Huzoor asked if I had published the diary which he had approved two days before.

I informed I had and took the opportunity to share a little feedback I had received.

In the diary I had mentioned that my wife and I had been blessed with a daughter in March and, during the call, I informed Huzoor that many people had congratulated me and sent *mubarakbaad* after reading about her birth.

Upon hearing this, Huzoor said:

“You did not write the name of your daughter – did people not ask what her name is?”

As I heard this, I thought of how carefully Huzoor checks the diary and how his recall was incredible, whereby he even noticed and remembered small details such as this.

In reply, I said:

“Huzoor, one or two people did ask but most just offered congratulations.”

As the topic of conversation had turned to our daughter Jaweria’s name, I took the opportunity to seek Huzoor’s guidance on a related topic.

I said:

“Huzoor, at the moment we do not have any middle names for Jaweria. Should we give her a middle name and if so what should it be?”

After a moment's silence, Huzoor said:

"You can call her Jaweria Abid."

Naturally, I was delighted by this. I had not imagined that my daughter could share my name. When I told my wife she was also extremely happy that Huzoor had chosen not only Jaweria's first name but also her middle one.

I continued to share some diary feedback with Huzoor and at one point, I misread the comment of one person.

Instead of saying:

"She has written that Huzoor's speech had a great and positive impact upon her..."

I said in error:

"She has written that MY SPEECH has had a great and positive impact upon her..."

Though I quickly corrected myself, it was not before Huzoor had heard what I said.

Jokingly, Huzoor said:

"I think whilst at home you must be delivering lots of speeches to Mala these days, which is why you assumed she was talking about you!"

I laughed at Huzoor's joke but also thought of how there was an underlying truth to Huzoor's joke. Being at home probably meant that I was commenting on domestic matters much more than normal!

A devoted servant

After around twenty minutes, I sensed the call was about to end but before it did, I took the opportunity to convey my condolences to Huzoor over the passing of respected Nasir Saeed sahib, a stalwart and devoted member of the *Amla-Hifazat*.

After being admitted to hospital a few days earlier following a severe heart attack, Nasir sahib had succumbed to his illness and passed away the day before. *Inna lillahey wa inna illahey rajعون*.

Learning of his sad demise had been extremely upsetting, although I had a sense of foreboding that he may not recover due to a comment made by Huzoor on my last visit to Islamabad.

On the previous Friday, there had been false rumours that Nasir sahib had passed away already. When I informed Huzoor about the rumours, Huzoor was not pleased at all but, at the same time, Huzoor's response indicated that Nasir sahib did not have long left to live.

At that time, Huzoor said:

“Why are people announcing his death whilst he is still alive? It should be made clear that these rumours are false and disrespectful in the

extreme. It may be that he does not survive, as his state is extremely critical, but it is utterly wrong and irresponsible to announce someone's death before their time. This can only cause unnecessary grief."

On the phone, after I had expressed my condolence, Huzoor said:

"Yes, it is particularly upsetting and difficult given the current circumstances (related to the COVID-19 lockdown). It is extremely painful that his family could not see him in hospital before he died and now people cannot go and offer condolence in person. Only the immediately family will be able to be present at the Janaza prayer and it will be done at the place of burial. Insha'Allah, when the circumstances permit I will lead his Janaza prayer in absentia."

Before the call ended, Huzoor said:

"Each day be ready, as I will call you if I have time. Be prepared like you would normally be for Mulaqat."

As Huzoor said these words, I realised and understood what Huzoor meant when he had said to me, just prior to the lockdown, that:

"Baqi phone par rabta."

That:

"Apart from that, we can communicate on the phone."

I was very much overwhelmed and, to be honest, stunned that Huzoor would consider speaking to me regularly on the phone.

Though nothing could be better than meeting Huzoor in person, over the next days and weeks, my sadness at not being able to report daily for Mulaqat was significantly mitigated by the great blessing of being able to speak regularly to Huzoor on the phone. *Alhamdulillah.*

A phone Mulaqat

On 7 April 2020, in the early evening, I was again blessed to receive a call from Huzoor. This time, I was prepared and had notes ready and presented a media briefing, as I would under normal circumstances in Huzoor's office.

The opportunity to speak to Huzoor on the phone was a great blessing and, in some respects, speaking on the phone was more intimate and personal than even speaking to Huzoor in person.

However, not being able to physically see Huzoor sometimes led to difficulty or confusion.

For example, when meeting Huzoor in his office, often there are moments of silence, sometimes long periods, in which Huzoor continues to read and review his files.

On the phone, that day and on those that followed, there were occasional moments of silence where I could not tell if Huzoor was working or if he was waiting for me to say something.

Anyway, at the start of the call, I mentioned that the death toll in the UK from COVID-19 was rising quickly and that in the past 24 hours over 800 people had died.

Huzoor expressed his deep sadness that so many lives were being lost and offered prayers for those who were suffering.

During the call, I mentioned how Sister Reem Shraiky, a Syrian Ahmadi, had contacted me overwhelmed with joy because Huzoor had called her and her husband Ibrahim Ikhlaq sahib to enquire after their health earlier that day.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“I told Reem that I considered it necessary to call her after reading the article she had written for the Press department about Ibrahim’s illness.”

Huzoor was referring to an article the *Press & Media Office* had published in which Sister Reem had very emotively and vividly described the trials and tribulations that she and her family had faced when Ibrahim sahib became critically unwell with COVID-19.

Huzoor once again mentioned (late) Nasir Saeed sahib and reiterated his regret that it was not currently possible for people to visit the family and offer support in person or to attend the burial.

I took the opportunity to mention how countless tributes to Nasir Saeed sahib were being posted on social media.

I said:

“Huzoor, I am quite sure that Nasir Saeed sahib will never have been on social media and probably will not have even known what it was, yet in the past couple of days I have seen dozens and dozens of messages on social media in his remembrance from Ahmadis across the world. He truly touched the hearts of people in so many countries.”

Thereafter, Huzoor kindly asked how my children were. I mentioned that they were well but that due to COVID-19 restrictions, our new-born daughter was not being seen by any health visitors or nurses, as would normally be the case. As a result, we were deprived of the reassurance that medical experts could give regarding her health and development.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“Do not worry, as long as she is feeding well she will be fine. Also make sure you check her temperature regularly. May Allah bless her.”

Truly, Huzoor’s guidance and prayers gave us comfort and reassurance that was a million times greater than could have been given by any health professional.

As the call drew towards a close, I mentioned that an individual had contacted me to express their opinion that perhaps the one silver lining of the lockdown would be that Huzoor would finally have some time to rest and to spend with his family.

Hearing this, Huzoor laughed a little and said:

“I have been in the office since the morning reviewing the mail and correspondence and so I have not noticed any difference to my schedule! Even the slot normally used for family Mulaqats is being utilised for other tasks.”

Prayers for the Prime Minister

Around that time, the health of the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson had deteriorated significantly and for a few days he was in intensive care.

Though his situation was reported to be quite critical, I felt confident he would recover because, when it was first reported that the Prime Minister had contracted the coronavirus, Huzoor had written a personal letter praying for his good health and full recovery.

Huzoor wrote also to Prince Charles who had also contracted the coronavirus and thankfully, both he and the Prime Minister recovered.

The need for sensitivity and compassion

On 8 April 2020, I received a call from beloved Huzoor and I informed him that we had received a lot of positive feedback to the article written by Sister Reem Shraiky.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“Do you know which part of the article I liked and appreciated the most? It was Reem’s response to the Ahmadi lady who had said to her, when Ibrahim was in a critical state, that ‘Don’t worry if you or your family is ill then it means that your sins are being forgiven’. In reply, Reem said ‘I also know very well the Hadith that you speak of but it does not require for you to remind me of this at a time when I am at my most vulnerable and weakest.’”

Huzoor continued:

“I am very glad that Reem wrote this because there are even some Ahmadis who are extremely insensitive and gossipy. This Hadith is a means of comfort to believers in their time of ailment and something for them to reflect upon. However, it is absolutely not the case that when someone is facing a trial they be reminded of their past sins! This is something that the Sadr Lajna should take note of and ensure that the Lajna members are taught about what is appropriate and how to comfort and console people when they are suffering.”

The importance of cleanliness and good hygiene

I informed Huzoor that the UK was now reaching the peak of coronavirus cases and so the death toll over the past 24 hours was over 900 people.

I also mentioned that it was now coming to the attention of the authorities that the proportion of people who were severely affected by coronavirus was significantly higher in ethnic minorities.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“As Muslims, we should always have the very highest standards of cleanliness in our personal hygiene, in our homes and elsewhere. This is the teaching of Islam and if people uphold the Islamic standard then the risk of infection will be less.”

Huzoor continued:

“Yesterday, on my instruction, the personal residences and communal areas here in Islamabad were disinfected. Furthermore, dhooni (incense) is being used in the offices and homes here, as it is a means of eliminating bacteria. You should also do this in your own home.”

Ramadan during a pandemic

On Friday 10 April, I reported for Mulaqat in Islamabad.

As I entered Huzoor’s office, I was struggling somewhat with my facemask. My glasses kept steaming up and the mask kept slipping. Huzoor noticed and explained how to make it fit better by depressing with my hand part of the mask to make it more secure around my nose.

The month of Ramadan was fast approaching and it was clear that Mosques would not be permitted to re-open for worship any time soon. In light of this, I asked Huzoor how this year's Ramadan would be affected by the pandemic.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“Pandemic or no pandemic, the blessings of Ramadan will always remain. Under normal circumstances it is extremely important to offer prayers in congregation, as this is the command of Allah the Almighty. One of the main reasons we join together in Mosques for worship is because it fosters unity within the Muslim Ummah.”

Huzoor continued:

“However, where a disease or virus is spreading then the rights of the Mosque actually determine that the worshippers refrain from offering prayers in the Mosque. At such a time, we should remember that there are also great blessings associated with worship in solitude and so Ahmadis should utilise this period to draw closer to Allah by worshipping Him in their homes.”

Huzoor further said:

“Whilst congregational worship enables us to become more united as an Ummah, it is when a person worships in isolation that he is able to truly open up his heart before Allah and to grow closer to Him. At this time, most people are at home and free from the shackles of their normal worldly endeavours and so, more than ever before, they may spend their

nights in Tahajjad and offer prayers and recite the Holy Quran throughout the day.”

I was struck by the beauty of Huzoor’s words which illustrated that we should make the best of our circumstances at all times.

Whether we could pray in our Mosques or not, the objectives of Ramadan and indeed of our lives remained ever the same.

Leading Jummah

After presenting a media briefing, I mentioned to Huzoor that I had led Jummah prayers in my home for the past two weeks.

Smiling, Huzoor said:

“Masha’Allah, as a result of the virus even you have learned how to perform Jummah!”

Huzoor enquired if I knew *Khutba Saania* by heart. I said that, having heard it every week throughout my life, I knew most of it by heart but I still needed to read it from a paper.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“It is good to keep it written in front of you, even if you know it by heart in case your memory fails and because when you read it your Tilawat will generally be of a better standard.”

A serious error of judgment

Over the weekend that followed, I was blessed with the opportunity to speak again with beloved Huzoor on the phone and to present a daily report to him.

However, those days were extremely difficult for me personally and ones that I look back on with major regret due to a mistake I made at that time.

Late evening on 12 April 2020, I received a message directly from Huzoor about a video *MTA News*, the MTA department for which I am responsible, had broadcast and which had come to Huzoor's attention.

The video was a tribute to (late) Nasir Saeed sahib. Apart from extracts from Huzoor's sermon about Nasir Sahib's long service to the Jamaat, it also included an interview taken with Nasir sahib's son, Khalid Saeed. The interview had been recorded just outside the Mubarak Mosque.

In his message, Huzoor stated that it was not at all appropriate to do the interview 'in person' because of the risk of spreading COVID-19, which Nasir sahib had contracted before his demise.

The next day, Monday, 13 April 2020, proved to be extremely difficult. The minutes and hours passed by painfully slowly. As the day progressed, I was left in no doubt that the risk posed by the interview had elicited the displeasure of Huzoor.

I was contacted by the *Managing Director* of MTA International, who had received a letter from Private Secretary, Munir Javed sahib conveying

Huzoor's disapproval and inquiry as to *why* and *how* this interview had taken place.

The MD launched an investigation seeking an urgent response from me and asking why I had authorised the interview. Munir Javed sahib also contacted me directly to enquire about the interview. It was all very stressful and I gave my response in which I confirmed that I had authorised the interview. An urgent circular was issued to the management of MTA International from the MD regarding this matter.

I felt extremely remorseful that I had, inadvertently, placed the cameraman at risk and thereafter anyone who he may have had contact with. Thankfully, the cameraman did keep a distance of two metres at all times and any equipment used was wiped down and disinfected. Nonetheless, the risk had been needlessly elevated.

Far beyond anything else, I felt devastated that I had caused upset to Huzoor and fallen way short of his expectations.

All day, part of me yearned to hear Huzoor's blessed voice, as I knew only speaking to him would grant me some respite and relief.

Yet, on the other hand, I feared more than anything hearing any sense of disappointment or anger in Huzoor's voice.

With the *Grace of Allah*, late in the afternoon, I was able to speak to Huzoor for around thirty five minutes on the phone.

When the call started, I fully expected that Huzoor would mention the *MTA News* incident.

However, to the contrary, he asked me how I was and how my family were. I was overwhelmed by his grace and compassion.

Nevertheless, for my own peace of mind, I had to apologise and seek Huzoor's forgiveness.

Thus, a minute or two into the call, I said:

“Huzoor, I am extremely sorry for the mistake I made regarding the MTA News interview.”

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“Did you not think it was wrong or irresponsible to take this interview?”

In response, I said:

“At the time, I advised that only the cameraman should be present and he should maintain a distance of at least two metres from Khalid sahib. I also said that any equipment should be cleaned thoroughly. I thought that this was sufficient. It was only when Huzoor sent his message that I realised that there was a heightened risk because Nasir Saeed sahib had contracted coronavirus.”

Huzoor said:

“Yes it was wrong. If you watch BBC News or the other channels they are conducting their interviews remotely via Skype or such like and so from now on, until further notice, all of your interviews should be conducted remotely.”

It is at times like this that a person witnesses the true majesty and grace of Khalifa-Waqt. Despite his displeasure, despite his disappointment, Huzoor did not humiliate me. He did not raise his tone. He did not end the call at that moment where he knew I was feeling extremely downcast.

In spite of his displeasure, Huzoor actually appreciated the contents of the video itself and asked if people had liked it.

As Huzoor said these words, it felt as though a weight had been lifted from my heart.

I informed Huzoor the viewing figures for the first 24 hours were far beyond any of our previous comparable videos.

I mentioned we had made similar ‘tribute’ videos for very senior elders and office bearers of the Jamaat from Pakistan such as Sahibzada Mirza Khursheed Ahmad sahib and Sahibzada Mirza Ghulam Ahmad sahib, however the response we were getting to the video about Nasir Saeed sahib was from much further afield.

Huzoor was not at all surprised by this.

Huzoor said:

“This was to be expected because Mian Khursheed and Mian Ahmad were known very well in Pakistan and a few other countries, whereas Nasir Saeed travelled around the world with Khalifa-Waqt and so Ahmadis in countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, New Zealand, Japan all knew him.

When the call ended, I felt a great degree of relief in my heart at having spoken to Huzoor and to have experienced his love and mercy, in spite of my shortcomings. Yet, my disappointment in myself and my sadness at having caused distress to Huzoor lingered and continued over the next 24 hours. As a result, I continued to feel anxious and restless that night and the following day.

The next day, 14 April 2020, at around 6.15pm, I received a call from the PS Office that Huzoor wished to speak to me.

Normally, the Private Secretary would connect the call to Huzoor within a few moments, however on that day I was placed on hold for some time.

With each minute and second that passed, I became increasingly nervous.

Though, I was starting to get used to speaking to Huzoor on the phone, the nerves and butterflies experienced certainly were not diminishing in any way.

After around ten minutes, Private Secretary, Munir Javed sahib took the call off hold and said:

“Abid, mein Huzoor ke saath call mil-wa-nay laga hoon.”

That:

“Abid, I am now putting you through to Huzoor.”

Each time Munir Javed sahib says this there is a pause of a few seconds and I cannot describe in words how nervous I feel during those moments until I hear Huzoor’s voice on the other end. The same was true that day.

As the call connected, Huzoor said ***“Assalamo Alaikum”*** and asked how I was.

In response, I said that I had continued to feel stressed and anxious over the past day due to the MTA News issue.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“If you make a blunder it is inevitable the day will pass in stress! However, sometimes it is beneficial in the long term to make a mistake because it makes the person more humble and they turn to Allah in their desperation and this enables them to reform and improve.”

Flawed figures

Thereafter, I presented some news reports to Huzoor and started by informing him of how many COVID-19 related deaths there had been in the UK over the past 24 hours.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“The figures the UK Government is giving is not the real figure because they are only related to hospital deaths and do not take into account the number of people who are dying in care homes or private residences.”

This was something that the UK Government later admitted and after a few weeks it started to include deaths in care homes or private residences in its figures.

I informed Huzoor that there had been media reports speculating when ‘*mass gatherings*’ would be permitted again in the UK. One report suggested August or September, another said perhaps October or November. Upon presenting this report, I wondered if Huzoor might give some indication about the possibility of holding the UK or Germany Jalsas but Huzoor remained quiet.

Patience, empathy and compassion required

I also informed Huzoor of a front page story published by *Forbes* which featured the political leaders of Germany, Taiwan, New Zealand and certain Scandinavian countries.

The article suggested that those countries had dealt with the coronavirus crisis better than other nations and highlighted the fact that common to each of these nations was that their political leader was a woman.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“Women have experience of the home and because of this they naturally have good managing skills and understand how to allocate limited resources. Furthermore, by looking after their homes, women have developed higher levels of patience, empathy and compassion. During this type of crisis, in which people are dying of illness or become ill, the women leaders know better how to manage the limited resources and are naturally more calm and compassionate than men and so are able to relate to the sufferings of their public better.”

An unnecessary suggestion

I also mentioned that an Ahmadi had written to me that Ahmadis were feeling anxious and panicked due to the effects of the coronavirus and so he suggested that Huzoor might lead an ‘*Aalmi dua*’ – an international collective prayer through MTA.

In response to this suggestion, Huzoor said:

“What is the need for such a dua when I am leading Jumma each week and it is being broadcast on MTA as normal? Some people have developed the ‘Pir’ mentality whereby they think that until a person raises his hands it is not a proper prayer. However, in every sermon, I am praying

for an end to this pandemic and offering prayers for the members of the Jamaat - if people who are watching say 'Ameen' then it will be an Aalmi dua in itself."

A year in Islamabad

On 15 April 2020, I had the opportunity to speak to Huzoor on the phone and at the start of the call I mentioned that it had been exactly one year since Huzoor moved to Islamabad from the Fazl Mosque.

Whilst most people have an emotional connection to certain dates or anniversaries that mark significant moments in their lives, I have always seen that Huzoor does not waste time or energy overly concerning himself with such matters.

It was the same on this occasion because after I informed Huzoor of the anniversary he simply said "*Masha'Allah*", followed immediately by "*Aur kya?*", meaning I should move on and present the next part of my report.

An awful haircut!

Later in the call, I mentioned I had attempted to cut my son's hair but it had not at all been successful!

Though the front looked ok, if someone saw his hair from above they would soon see that it was cut to various levels and there was a large, rather random square where his hair was at least an inch shorter than the rest of his head.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“If you do not have proper clippers then try to get one of those combs that has a blade attached. It cuts as it combs and this is how I used to cut my hair in Ghana using the comb’s blade and a mirror.”

Mulaqat in Islamabad

On Friday 17 April 2020, I reported for Mulaqat in Islamabad.

During the Mulaqat, Huzoor asked me if I had enough facemasks. Upon hearing that I had only a few, Huzoor stood and took three masks from a box in his office and gave them to me.

They were different to the ones I had and Huzoor said to wear one of the masks he had given in my next Mulaqat.

To my complete surprise, Huzoor took a mask for himself and placed it on his face. It seemed Huzoor was trying on a mask for the first time or at least it was the first time he kept it on for some time.

Very carefully, Huzoor fitted the mask on his face and squeezed it around his nose to ensure it fitted well and, having done so, he turned his attention back to the file on his desk and started going through his mail.

After a few minutes, Huzoor looked up at me and smiled. Huzoor said:

“It is not easy to wear these masks for a long period!”

In response, I said:

“Yes it is difficult, my face becomes hot and my glasses steam up.”

I then said:

“Huzoor, I honestly never expected to see that day where I would see you in a mask and also that I would be wearing a mask in your presence!”

Huzoor smiled and simply said:

“Haan” meaning *“Yes”*.

A period of anxiety & the love of a father

I was somewhat anxious and worried the next day, 18 April 2020, because our two elder children, Mahid and Moshahid, had both developed symptoms associated with the coronavirus. One had a persistent cough, whilst the other had a fever. Given we had a new-born in the home, we were even more worried.

I was initially in two minds as to whether I should inform Huzoor. Part of me thought it might just be a normal ‘run of the mill’ cold or cough, which children often get and recover from quickly. Yet, at the back of my mind, was of course the possibility that it could be COVID-19.

We called the *NHS 111* service and though they were helpful, they were unable to provide any clarity about the children’s symptoms. They simply

advised that it could be coronavirus or equally it could be a normal cough or cold.

To put my mind at ease, I then sent a message to Huzoor informing him and seeking his prayers. Even though I have had many experiences of Huzoor's love and grace, I was completely blown away by his love and concern throughout that day and in the coming days.

I tend not to mention my wife Mala in my diaries as much as I used to. One reason is that a couple of people expressed their view that it was inappropriate for me to refer to my wife and to mention her name in my diaries. In my view, theirs was quite an extreme position to take and not one I shared. Nonetheless, their opinion had a subliminal effect that meant I was more reluctant to mention her in my recent diaries.

Still, I believe it is necessary to mention her at this point because when the children became unwell she was far more anxious and worried than me.

She believed there was a strong chance that they had contracted COVID-19 and given how the news was punctuated with occasional horror stories of healthy children becoming suddenly critically unwell, her fears escalated and very quickly she became panicked and desperate.

She was worried that she or I would contract the coronavirus and would not be able to take care of our children and, above all, she was terrified that the children could be hospitalised and we would not be able to be with them.

She kept referring to the devastating story of a 13 year old boy who had died from the coronavirus without any of his family being present during his hospital stay or even at his funeral.

Given that our children's symptoms were mild, I kept trying to reassure that she should not worry and everything would be fine but, as a mother, she was panicked and I could not offer her the respite or comfort she required.

Where I could not relieve her concerns, the sheer mercy, compassion and love of Khilafat meant that all her fears were soon swept away and by the end of the day her panic and anxiety was completely relieved.

Shortly, after I informed Huzoor, he sent an extremely loving message filled with prayers.

He instructed that we start giving the children the homeopathy remedy for coronavirus and also said I should consult with Dr Hafeez Bhatti sahib (*in-charge central Homeopathy Department*) and then report back to Huzoor.

I immediately called Dr Hafeez Bhatti sahib who explained how the homeopathy should be given to the children.

I thanked Dr Hafeez sahib and said that I was praying for him not only because he was treating our children but treating Ahmadis around the world.

Upon this, Dr Hafeez Bhatti sahib became emotional and said:

“I do not warrant any thanks, rather all gratitude should be directed to Khalifa-Waqt and it is his grace that he is permitting me to serve and please pray I can serve until my last day.”

With that, I received a further message from Huzoor stating:

“At this time (when coronavirus was still near the peak stage) it is better to avoid going to the hospital if possible. In addition to the homeopathy, give your children honey. You should all sip cinnamon (daar-cheeni) infused water regularly. Give the child who has fever paracetamol every four or five hours and give the child with the cough paracetamol twice a day. You should also place some Vicks in a pan of boiling water twice a day and let the steam naturally circulate in the home for half an hour. May Allah the Almighty heal them and grant full recovery.”

A little later, Huzoor sent a further instruction:

“Regarding the steam, it should not be inhaled or brought near any person, rather leave the pan on the stove and the Vicks-infused steam will naturally spread within your home.”

Thereafter, at regular intervals during the next few days and even at *Fajr* time the next morning, I received messages from Huzoor with further instructions and asking how the children were. He also most graciously phoned me and before hearing the daily news report, Huzoor enquired about the health of the children.

Furthermore, Huzoor instructed that I should remain home on Friday, instead of coming to Islamabad and that he would call me on that evening.

Huzoor's love and concern was so much that it was actually a burden upon my heart that we were taking up so much of Huzoor's precious time.

I swear to Allah the Almighty that no father or mother could love their child more than Huzoor loves the members of the Jamaat.

Upon receiving Huzoor's constant guidance and prayers, Mala's panic and worries were alleviated. We were both sure that whatever symptoms the children had they would fully recover and with the Grace of Allah they both soon did.

Need for caution

The next day, early evening, I received a call from beloved Huzoor during which I mentioned that there were indications that some countries were now starting to make plans of slowly exiting their respective lockdowns.

I asked Huzoor if he thought it was the right time to start easing restrictions.

In response, Huzoor said:

“In the West, the country that has dealt with the coronavirus most successfully has been Germany because it brought in restrictions at an early stage and because it was also far ahead in testing. If the UK or France had followed Germany's steps then there would have been less

deaths in their countries. Now is not the time for the UK to reduce restrictions but in Germany it may be possible though they too should continue to tread very carefully. For example, if they plan to re-open schools they should try to limit the class numbers to around 10 children at any one time so that distances between the children can be maintained.

I also mentioned an article printed by the German newspaper *Bild* in which they had blamed China for the coronavirus and had published a symbolic invoice of 149 billion euros for China to pay to Germany to cover its financial losses.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“Such things are senseless. Will every nation now send a bill for its losses to China? Instead of fostering unity, this will create needless tension and friction between the nations without any benefit. Have Western countries ever paid back the damage they have caused in other parts of the world through their unjust policies?”

A wrong innovation

I also mentioned how the day before a lot of Ahmadis were posting tributes to Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) and sharing their memories of him in light of the fact that it had been 19 April, the day on which he had passed away in 2003. I had seen similar posts in previous years but it seemed to me that more people had posted messages and tributes this time.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“To mark the day someone has died is not just unnecessary but is wrong. There is no such thing as marking a ‘death anniversary’ in Islam. The reason more people will have posted messages this year is that they are at home and so are spending more time on social media. They will have seen some messages and thought that they too would join in and post their own memories or photos. If Ahmadis wish to honour and respect Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) they should seek to follow the instructions of the Promised Messiah (as) and the Khulafa, rather than sending a message once a year.”

An ideal retirement home

During another ‘*phone Mulaqat*’ that week, I mentioned that President Trump had placed a restriction on immigration and the issuing of *green cards*.

He said it was an emergency measure due to the coronavirus pandemic but some people were speculating the US Government was using the coronavirus as an excuse to reduce immigration.

Hearing this, Huzoor mentioned a member of my family who might be affected. I said I knew of another person who was considering moving from the USA back to Pakistan, as they felt it was a better place to retire to.

Concurring with their sentiments, Huzoor said:

“If you grow up in Pakistan, even if you migrate in later life, Pakistan always remains in your blood and most Pakistanis would find retirement much more comfortable in Pakistan, as compared to other countries. In Western countries, the elders have to continue to do most jobs themselves, even when they reach an age where it is extremely difficult for them to exert themselves. On the other hand, life in Rabwah is much more comfortable for elderly Pakistanis. Greater care is available and the cost of living is less.”

I asked Huzoor if he meant that there was greater *sakoon* (peace of mind) in Rabwah.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“I cannot say that everyone in Rabwah has sakoon because they continue to live in the shadow of daily persecution. However, in terms of lifestyle they have greater comfort and ease.”

Huzoor continued:

“On the other hand, for people brought up in the West, it might not be easy for them to retire in Pakistan. It all depends on your upbringing and what is in your blood.”

For some reason, I could not hear what Huzoor said next but I was sure he had mentioned Rabwah and Qadian and it appeared to me that perhaps Huzoor was asking whether he should post me to Rabwah or Qadian.

I did not wish to ask Huzoor to repeat and so I just went with what I thought I had heard and so I replied:

“Huzoor, if you go to Rabwah or Qadian, I would be happy there – wherever you are is where my peace is and where I will be content.”

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“Acha theek hain... aur kya hai?”

That:

“Ok that’s fine... what else?”

To this day, I do not know if my response was according to what I think I had heard or whether I misheard and Huzoor thought that I have given a strange unrelated answer!

The Wrath of God through one’s leadership

During a call with Huzoor on 24 April 2020, I informed Huzoor of news that the US President had given a bizarre media briefing the evening before in which he had advocated the possibility of ingesting bleach as one way to tackle COVID-19.

It was scarcely believable that the leader of the world's most powerful country could be saying such things.

I informed Huzoor that some bleach companies had been forced to release statements clarifying that bleach should not be ingested in any form or under any circumstances.

After hearing the report, Huzoor said:

“This statement about ingesting bleach is the height of ignorance and beyond belief. Sometimes, God punishes nations for their injustices and cruelties by giving them leaders who humiliate the entire nation and its people.”

A precious Urdu Class moment

A day or two before, I had shared a video clip with Huzoor from MTA's archive. It was a clip of an *Urdu Class* from 1997 in which Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) showed a photo of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) and introduced him.

It was my good fortune to have been present in that Urdu Class and Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) spoke with me at that moment and reminded me that Sahibzada Mirza Masroor Ahmad, as he was then, had visited Hartlepool with him earlier that year.

I remember that moment quite clearly. In fact, as a teenager in 1997, I remember thinking that there must be something very special about

Sahibzada Mirza Masroor Ahmad because Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) had mentioned him with great love and affection.

Looking back, I consider it a great blessing that Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh), with whom I spent a lot of time as a child, introduced me to that blessed person who was destined to take charge of fulfilling the mission of the Promised Messiah (as) and for whom I have been most privileged to serve closely for many years.

During the phone call, Huzoor mentioned the video clip and much to my surprise, Huzoor instructed that I share it with others. I was embarrassed to share the clip publicly given that I was present in it but sensing my reticence, Huzoor again instructed that I should share it with others and that it would prove of benefit for some people.

As a result, I first posted the clip on a family *WhatsApp* group, followed by a small group of staff members from my office. Finally, I posted it on *Twitter* through which it was disseminated far and wide.

Over the next day or two, I received many messages from Ahmadis in various countries in response to the clip. Many wrote that their faith had increased and they felt happy and emotional to see Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) speak so lovingly of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba).

It was after receiving such comments that I realised what Huzoor had meant when he said that it would prove of benefit for the clip to be shared.

Sad news

We were reaching late April 2020 and whilst it was being said that the UK was passing the peak of COVID-19, the death toll remained extremely high.

Sadly, another Ahmadi, Ghulam Mustafa sahib, who served as a volunteer in the PS Office, also passed away and so during a call with Huzoor on 27 April 2020, I offered my condolences.

In response, Huzoor said:

“Now two members of Islamabad Jamaat, Nasir Saeed and Ghulam Mustafa, have passed away after contracting the coronavirus. Ghulam Mustafa had a very good quality that he was always in the Mosque and his life was centred around it. May Allah the Almighty bless and protect his wife and children and enable them to always stay close to the Jamaat.”

A timely move

I mentioned I was receiving regular feedback about an article written by Ibrahim Ikhlaq sahib about his experiences with COVID-19.

I asked Huzoor if he agreed with Ibrahim sahib’s point that Huzoor’s move to Islamabad before the onset of the coronavirus was also part of Allah’s planning.

In response, Huzoor said:

“Yes what he says is right because it would have been much more problematic if the Markaz had remained at the Fazl Mosque during the pandemic. It would not have been possible for me to go to the Mosque or to leave the building in which my residence and office was. Furthermore, many of the staff members in the PS Office and the other central offices based in Islamabad live on site and so they are able to continue working, whereas if we were at the Fazl Mosque it would not have been possible for them to report for duty.”

Love through reformation

A few days earlier I had written an article in which I had interviewed Qamar Suleman sahib, also known as ‘Babbi’, from Rabwah.

I told Huzoor that one point which had struck me was that Qamar Suleman sahib said that sometimes Huzoor had, on occasion, personally paid the financial dues owed by individuals according to the judgment of the Darul Qadha.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“I have mentioned in my sermons that I am greatly pained and saddened whenever I have to take action against any Ahmadi. The only reason that I give any sanction is because it is my duty for the sake of reforming the individual and ensuring wellbeing of the Jamaat. And yes, Babbi is right, there have been some occasions where I personally paid whatever was

owed by one party so that the dispute would end and to ensure that the unity of the Jamaat was not threatened in any way.”

Cancellation of Jalsa Salana UK

As the days passed by, I wondered about the UK Jalsa Salana. It seemed almost impossible for it to take place in August as planned, however it had not yet been officially cancelled or postponed.

Late April, I plucked up the courage to ask Huzoor. I said:

“Huzoor, is there any possibility for the UK Jalsa to take place?”

In response, Huzoor said:

“Forget it – it cannot take place this year! For one, the Government will not permit mass gatherings so soon and, even if that were not the case, it is simply not possible to manage it safely during this pandemic.”

Though I am certain Huzoor will have felt sadness that the Jalsa could not take place, he remained positive.

Huzoor said:

“The money saved from the Jalsa budget can be reallocated to fulfil other important Jamaat projects. Furthermore, it will enable us to increase our service to humanity, which is needed more than ever during this time.”

I asked Huzoor if there was any possibility of holding the Jalsa towards the end of the year.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“It is too early to say, we will see later.”

A few days later, Amir Sahib UK sent out a circular informing members of the Jamaat that, according to Huzoor’s instructions, the Jalsa would not take place in August.

The wisdom of Khilafat

I informed Huzoor that the UK Government Education Minister had announced that whenever schools would reopen in the UK, the class sizes would be limited and that it would not be possible for the full school to reopen at once.

After learning of this, Huzoor said:

“I told you some days ago that when they reopen school it should be done with smaller classes and that this was the only way to do it safely.”

In response, I said:

“Huzoor, probably the Government spent millions commissioning reports and taking scientific advice before reaching this decision – if they

had come to you and sought your guidance they would have saved a lot of money and time!”

Huzoor laughed and seemed to enjoy the comment.

Though my comment was light-hearted, there is no doubt that Allah the Almighty has granted Khalifa-Waqt wisdom not only in religious matters but also in secular affairs.

From time to time, there are some humble leaders or politicians who have sought Huzoor’s advice and guidance.

Sadly, the majority remain oblivious to the great blessings associated with Khilafat and we can only pray that they or their successors come to recognise the truth.

Holding his umbrella

Earlier that day, a Khadim who was on duty at Islamabad contacted me to express his sadness that because of the requirements of social distancing, Huzoor now had to hold his own umbrella when it rained.

During the call, I mentioned this to Huzoor.

In response, Huzoor said:

“Agar umbrella pakar na par gya tu phir kya huwa?”

That:

“So what if I had to hold my umbrella?”

Huzoor continued:

“It was raining at Fajr time and so Ahmad (Muhammad Ahmad sahib) came forward with the umbrella but I told him and the other security team members to stay back. Then, Waqas (Sahibzada Mirza Waqas Ahmad) came forward and offered to hold the umbrella but I told him that I will carry it myself.”

Laughing Huzoor said:

“Mein tu azaad huwa hoon! Enjoy kar ra hoon!”

Meaning:

“I have become free and am enjoying it!”

Upon this, I said:

“Huzoor, if you feel free and happy then it is good!”

Certainly, it felt that Huzoor was enjoying those little things which we tend to take for granted, such as holding an umbrella and not having crowds of people constantly around him.

In normal circumstances, Huzoor permits his security staff to hold his umbrella or members of Khuddam to hand him the shoe-horn as he exits the Mosque but not because he desires such protocol or help. Rather, he permits such things because they fulfil *our* desire to reap the blessings associated with serving Khilafat.

We can only imagine how restricting, even suffocating, it must be for Khalifa-Waqt to have his every movement shadowed and to always be in the public eye. Yet, Huzoor has always accepted this burden for the sake of Allah the Almighty.

This does not mean that he never misses his old life prior to Khilafat in which he had the privacy and freedom that the rest of us take for granted. Thus, the happiness in Huzoor's voice when he spoke of holding his own umbrella.

Press & Media guidance

On 1 May 2020, on Huzoor's instruction, I once again remained at home on Friday, rather than reporting for Mulaqat, as it had not yet been two weeks since our children had been unwell.

Most graciously, Huzoor called me in the evening and asked how I was.

In response, rather than responding to Huzoor's question, for some reason I said:

"Huzoor, I listened to your Khutba Jummah today."

In reply, Huzoor said:

“The way you are saying this it seems you have listened to my Khutba for the very first time!”

Thereafter, I mentioned that in Holland non-Ahmadi Muslims had requested permission for the Azan at the time of Friday prayers to be broadcast over a loudspeaker in some Dutch cities.

Certain media outlets were asking our Jamaat for its opinion on this matter.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

“Holland is not an Islamic country and so we cannot demand or expect that the Azan be played on a loudspeaker. If the authorities decide to reject this request it is their choice and their right. However, if they choose to permit it we will consider it a gesture of kindness and a favour upon the Muslim community and will very much appreciate it.”

During the news briefing, I also presented the case of a Sikh doctor working for the NHS, who had refused to shave his beard, as required by his hospital so that a specialist PPE facemask could be fitted to protect him from COVID-19. As a result, he had been sidelined from frontline duties.

I had read comments suggesting the doctor was being somewhat militant, whilst I also saw others saying the NHS management should not force him to put aside his religious beliefs.

I asked Huzoor what Muslim doctors should do in such circumstances.

In reply, Huzoor suggested that a balanced solution ought to be found, in which the religious convictions and sentiments did not need to clash with the demands of serving humanity.

Huzoor said:

"A beard does not have to be full-length and so to uphold their religious beliefs a Muslim doctor could keep a very short stubble beard around which their professional masks could still fit securely."

Lead by example

Later in the week, I received a call from Huzoor in which I mentioned that my elder son had turned 7 and I sought Huzoor's guidance about whether it was now necessary for him to offer all five daily prayers.

In particular, I was not sure if it was necessary to wake him for Fajr or to keep him awake for Isha on those summer days when Isha is offered very late at night.

Huzoor's response was a reflection of Islam's balanced and moderate teachings.

He made it clear that at the age of seven there was still room for some flexibility but that every effort should be made to convey the importance of Salat and its practice.

Huzoor said:

“Tell Mahid that he should offer at least two or three prayers every day and if he can manage all five then it is even better. Most importantly you should lead by your personal example. If you are leading Namaz in your home these days he will naturally offer them with you and it will become his habit without any effort.”

Huzoor continued:

“Treat him with love and softness but you should make it clear to him from now that when he reaches the age of 10 it will be his obligation to pray five times a day. Also, as it is Ramadan, you should let him do a chiri roza (baby fast) so that he comes to understand the spirit of Ramadan. Wake him one day and let him eat a good sehri (pre-dawn breakfast) and then he can end his fast with a meal at midday.”

After the call, I told Mahid that Huzoor had given special instructions for him regarding Salat and Ramadan and he was extremely happy.

The next weekend he did a *chiri roza*, as suggested by Huzoor, and it was clear that it enabled him to start appreciating the spirit of Ramadan.

Turning to Allah the Almighty

I mentioned to Huzoor that it seemed as though we would have to offer Eid prayers in our home.

In response, Huzoor said that he had already given instructions to Amir Sahib UK to inform Jamaat members that Eid prayers would be offered in homes, as there was no chance of Government restrictions on places of worship being lifted before the end of Ramadan.

As I considered the likelihood of not seeing any family or friends and, above all, not seeing Huzoor and not offering Namaz behind him on Eid day, I said:

“Huzoor, bohat ajeeb dunya hogi hai, bohat ajeeb halaat hogay hain.”

That:

“Huzoor, the world and the current circumstances are extremely strange.”

Responding in the most beautiful way, Huzoor said:

“Phir Allah say chimat jao, yay hi hul hai, yay hi tareeka hai.”

Meaning:

“Then attach yourself to Allah, this is the only solution, this is the only way.”

A better way to mark VE Day

Over the next few days, I continued to receive regular phone calls from beloved Huzoor in the evenings. Huzoor continued to give guidance on our office affairs and would give instructions as required.

For example, the UK Jamaat asked me to seek Huzoor's guidance about whether they could display flags, bunting or banners at our Mosques on the 75th anniversary of VE Day as a means of celebration.

Though, Huzoor permitted a written statement to be published, he did not permit for celebratory gestures at the Mosque.

Huzoor said:

“At this time, many people are still dying from the coronavirus and others are unwell and so it is not appropriate to celebrate. Tell the UK Jamaat that whatever money they would have spent on such celebrations should instead be donated to charities helping those who are suffering or be given to the health services.”

Failing to heed

On another day, I informed Huzoor that the UK's coronavirus death toll had surpassed that of Italy and was now second only to the United States globally.

After hearing this, Huzoor said:

“When the situation in Italy had reached its peak, the Italian Government urged countries like the UK to learn from its mistakes and to impose social restrictions earlier. However, the UK did not learn from Italy’s mistakes and remained very slow to take proper action and the result is now before us all.”

A time for worldly leaders to reform

During another Mulaqat, Huzoor indicated that he felt that it may be the time for him to write again to certain world leaders. He said I should be ready to take dictation for the letters from him in the coming days.

Huzoor said:

“It is necessary for me to directly warn the leaders that the time has come for them to turn to God Almighty. I have given this message many times before but, given the gravity of the coronavirus and its unprecedented effect on the world, now is the time to address them once again and explain that it is only through the Grace and Mercy of God that humanity can be saved from further misery and destruction.”

Filled with grief

Suddenly one day, during the week beginning 11 May, the calls from Huzoor stopped.

I assumed that Huzoor was busy and comforted myself with the fact that *Insha'Allah* I would see him again in Islamabad on Friday.

Yet, like countless Ahmadis, the moment I saw Private Secretary, Munir Javed sahib appear on MTA at 1pm on Friday 15 May 2020, I knew that something was seriously wrong.

As he began to speak, my heart sunk. He delivered a message from Huzoor in which he mentioned that he had fallen a few days earlier and sustained quite serious injuries, which meant he was unable to deliver the Friday Sermon.

I do not need to describe the feelings of desperation, devastation and heartache I felt because every Ahmadi felt the same. A sense of confusion and of being useless overwhelmed me that my beloved Khalifa had been injured and I had been blissfully unaware.

Though, I was then able to contact Huzoor and he reassured me that he was, Alhamdulillah, recovering very well, I continued to feel a deep sense of unease.

This restlessness continued, until a few days later, when I was able to meet Huzoor for the first time after his fall.

Seeing my beloved once again

I will never forget that moment when I entered Huzoor's office and saw him for the first time since he had fallen and injured himself.

Before entering, I kept wondering how I would enquire about Huzoor's health and what words I would use.

Yet, before I had the chance to say anything, Huzoor said:

“Abid how are you, how is Mala and how are the children?”

I could not believe that even at that time where it was my duty and obligation and heartfelt desire to ask Huzoor how *he* was, it was he who enquired after the health of me and my family.

As I sat down, I was relieved to see that Huzoor's injuries were healing extremely well and were hardly noticeable. I was further reassured at the sight of Huzoor sitting at his desk as normal.

The only difference was that he was not wearing an *achkan* and was just in *shalwar kameez*.

I do not know if that was due to the residual effect of his injuries or merely due to the warmer weather.

When it came to my turn to ask Huzoor how he was, I twisted my words and had to repeat myself three times before Huzoor understood what I was saying.

My emotions were getting the better of me and so the clarity of my spoken Urdu, weak at the best of times, was utterly incoherent.

Huzoor explained how he had fallen.

It is not my place or my desire to narrate the details, yet what I wish to say is that Huzoor's courage and bravery at that time was an example for all men.

Huzoor had gone into his garden with purpose of turning off a switch and after falling severely, he got up himself and went and completed that errand, before returning to his house and calling Dr Shabbir Bhatti sahib who, thankfully, was on site at Islamabad.

Despite the pain and severity of injury, Huzoor told me that *he* reassured Dr Shabbir sahib and told him not to worry and to attend to his injuries without any sense of panic or worry.

Telling me about the next few days, Huzoor said:

“Alhamdulillah, I am much better now and the pain has mostly subsided. Even during the first few days, even though I was in pain and was unable to come to the office, I used to send Waqas (Sahibzada Mirza Waqas Ahmad) to get the office files and letters and I would review them in my home.”

Upon this, I said:

“Huzoor, during that time I was also sending office letters to you and would receive them back from your office the next day. When I learned that you had been injured I felt so embarrassed that I had burdened you

with non-essential letters but at the same time amazed that you had continued to go through it so quickly.”

Thereafter, Huzoor said:

“When I first got injured I feared that it would take me at least two weeks to recover but with Allah’s Grace and Mercy the recovery has been much faster.”

As he continued to work, Huzoor said that he still had some pain in his knees and in his wrist.

Given he had said this, I was surprised to see Huzoor walk to a cupboard near his desk and bend down for several moments, whilst undoubtedly putting extra strain on his knees.

As he stood up, I saw Huzoor had taken something out of the cupboard, which he gave to me as an early Eid gift. I could barely control my tears.

Time and time again, Khalifa-Waqt is he who ignores his own pain due to his love for us.

He is the person who makes every possible sacrifice in the cause of Islam and to ensure the wellbeing of Ahmadi Muslims across the world.

May Allah enable every Ahmadi Muslim to recognise how fortunate we are to have Khilafat. *Ameen.*

Conclusion

In this personal account, I have shared some moments which I have had the opportunity to spend in the company of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) during the lockdown period, many of which were via the telephone.

Every moment was special but I pray with all my heart that the pandemic soon passes so that we come to see, even more than before, the joys and blessings that have been ever present during Huzoor's period of Khilafat.

I end by asking all people who may come across this diary to continually pray for the long life and good health of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) and that we are all able to remain completely faithful to the institution of Khilafat. *Ameen.*

End

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