

**THE BLESSED TOUR OF HAZRAT KHALIFATUL MASIH V (ABA) TO THE  
UNITED STATES**

**SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2022**

**Part 1**

**A Personal Account**

***By Abid Khan***

## **Introduction**

Most people reading this diary will be aware that in late September 2022, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) travelled to the United States for an historic and extremely blessed three-week visit.

Given that Huzoor had not travelled abroad or within the UK since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, his tour to the United States was particularly special. It was uplifting, emotional and faith-inspiring.

Every moment proved captivating and joyous not just for the USA Jamaat but for Ahmadis worldwide.

It was something that – when Covid was at its peak – Ahmadis wondered when they would experience such moments again.

Setting aside Covid, the past year has been difficult, as efforts to undermine and attack the character of Khalifatul Masih reached a level that people of my generation or those younger than me had not seen before.

To see the blessed character of the person whom I and countless others know to be pure, merciful and compassionate being attacked and maligned so unjustly was hurtful in the extreme and a source of immense grief.

Some claimed that the bond between Khilafat and members of the Jamaat had been fractured.

Yet through such times, Huzoor's trust in Allah never once wavered. Rather, he continually guided us to show patience and to place our trust in Allah the Almighty.

And, Alhamdulillah, amongst so many other blessings, the visit to the United States manifested how the unique bond between Khilafat and the members of the Jamaat was not, God forbid, broken but stronger than ever.

I have travelled to the United States with Huzoor on several occasions and, never before have I felt such heightened emotions of love and loyalty towards Khilafat as I witnessed during the recent visit. I am certain that many other people present would testify to the same.

In this diary, I will mention some of my experiences and observations both in the days before the tour and during it.

However, I am certain that whatever I write can never do justice to the true weight of blessings of Huzoor's visit to the United States.

### **Travelling with Huzoor**

On Monday, 26 September 2022, apart from Huzoor's respected wife (Khala Saboohi), there were 12 members of the Qafila who were fortunate to travel as part of Huzoor's entourage.

There were four security staff – *Sakhawat Bajwa, Abdul Qadous Khawaja, Mahmood Khan and Mirza Laeeq Ahmad.*

The office staff comprised *Munir Ahmad Javed (Private Secretary)*, *Abdul Majid Tahir (Additional Wakil-ul-Tabshir)*, *Mubarak Ahmad Zafar (Additional Wakil-ul-Maal)*, *Omair Aleem (in-charge Makhzan-e-Tasaweer)* and me travelling on behalf of the Press & Media Office.

*Dr Tanvir Ahmed* and *Munum Naeem*, both from the USA Jamaat, were also Qafila members and remained present throughout the tour. Dr Tanvir sahib served as the on-duty physician throughout the tour, whilst Munum Naeem sahib coordinated the travel arrangements.

In addition, an MTA team, led by *Munir Odeh (Director, MTA Production)* had travelled in advance from London. Furthermore, Huzoor had accepted the request of several Ahmadis to travel personally to the United States and to join the security team.

### **A lesson learned**

A few days after this year's Jalsa Salana UK concluded, I received an invite from Amir Sahib UK for a dinner to be held at Baitul Futuh for some of the Jalsa guests and workers. It seemed to have been arranged quite suddenly as the invites were issued just the night before.

As I had to report for Mulaqat in Islamabad in the early evening, I did not think I would reach Baitul Futuh on time and so I decided not to attend. However, a few hours before the dinner, I received a call from Amir Sahib asking if I would be attending. I mentioned it would be difficult but he insisted that I should come whenever I am free and that I should bring my wife and children as well.



Given Amir Sahib had specially called, I thought I should attend and I also thought it would be enjoyable to spend the drive to and from Baitul Futuh with my family, who I had hardly seen during the Jalsa period.

I messaged my wife Mala to tell her about the event. However, initially she was reluctant to attend, as there were only a couple of hours before we would have to leave and she did not think she and the children would be able to get ready in time. However, after some extended persuasion from my side, she agreed and over the next couple of hours she hurriedly got herself and the children ready.

I picked them up and we went to Islamabad together. The plan was that I would attend Mulaqat and then we would drive to Baitul Futuh. The children, especially my two older children, were extremely excited. They loved going to Baitul Futuh and were delighted to be invited to an event where there was sure to be plentiful *langhar* food!

As I went to report for Mulaqat, my family remained in the car. By now, Mala, having successfully gotten everyone ready in time, was also looking forward to the evening out.

During my Mulaqat, I presented my report to Huzoor and then, just as I was leaving, Huzoor enquired:

***“Are you going to Amir Sahib’s dinner at Baitul Futuh?”***

I explained to Huzoor that I had not planned to go but had changed my mind after Amir Sahib had specially called.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

***“At the moment, due to Covid, it is not wise to take such risks. If you have told Amir Sahib you are coming then you can attend but make sure you wear your facemask diligently.”***

Thereafter, Huzoor said:

***“And don’t take your family, otherwise they could easily catch Covid. Just go yourself and be careful.”***

As soon as I heard Huzoor instruct that I should not take my family, I thought of how they were waiting in the car very excited. I also thought of how Mala had not initially wanted to go and I had been the one to persuade her!

For a second, I contemplated informing Huzoor that they were waiting in the car and were ready so that he might still permit them to attend. However, I refrained from doing so. Huzoor had given an instruction and it was our duty to act upon it.

As I returned to the car, I could not help but smile at the situation! I explained to Mala and the children Huzoor’s instructions and that I would drop them at home and only I would attend the dinner.

Mala laughed at the fact that she had gotten ready and was now returning home all dressed up! Nonetheless, she was very grateful for Huzoor's love and concern. Our toddler, Jaweria, was none the wiser and was quite happy to follow the updated plan!

However, a sense of disappointment in our two elder children, Mahid and Moshahid, was palpable. Both seemed a little stunned that Huzoor had given an instruction that was against their wishes.

Until now, they had only ever received love from Huzoor and this was the first time they had experienced an instruction from Huzoor that went against their natural inclinations. Seeing their reaction, I thought it would be a good opportunity to explain to them that this was their first 'test' regarding obedience to Khilafat.

So, on the way home, I explained how Huzoor had always shown them so much love and cared for them. He regularly sent them chocolates and replied to their letters very lovingly.

Now, for the first time, Huzoor had given an instruction which was against what they had wanted and so, as Waqf-e-Nau, would they happily accept it or complain?

*Alhamdulillah*, they quickly understood and by the time we got home they were happy and had soon forgotten about the event at Baitul Futuh.

The next day, when I reported for Mulaqat, I told Huzoor the entire story and that I was pleased that my children had the opportunity to make a small

sacrifice for the sake of being obedient to Khilafat and had learned an important lesson about obedience.

As he listened to the story, Huzoor smiled, especially when he heard the part about Mala getting dressed up and ultimately having nowhere to go! I also felt that Huzoor was surprised to learn that they had been waiting in the car all ready to go.

Having heard the story, Huzoor turned to face one of the cupboards behind his desk chair and proceeded to take out an array of various boxes and bars of chocolate.

Most graciously, Huzoor said:

***“These are a reward for your children from me!”***

Huzoor also gave some chocolates to Mala and me.

There were so many that, where I felt delighted to receive the gift from Huzoor and imagined the look of happiness on my children’s faces, I felt a little embarrassed carrying them in front of the various staff and people waiting for Mulaqat outside in the PS Office! I managed to hide some inside my file and others under my jacket but there were so many that it was still noticeable!

*Alhamdulillah*, the children’s faces lit up with pure excitement and joy as they received their gifts from Huzoor!

### **A few days leave**

A few days later, towards the end of August, I nervously sought Huzoor's permission for three days of holiday. The school summer holidays were coming to an end and I had it in my mind that I would likely be travelling to the United States and so I thought to ask Huzoor if I could take a few days of leave to spend with my family.

I am always nervous and cautious when requesting holiday. It is not because I fear Huzoor will be displeased or will reject the request. Instead, I fear that I may take leave when I could be needed for work by Huzoor.

I had written to request three days leave and Huzoor had granted it. Still, the day before the leave was due, I reminded Huzoor and asked if it was still permissible for me to take three family days.

Smiling Huzoor said:

***“Yes, you can take three days – you can take four or even five days if you like but just remember that from 1<sup>st</sup> September onwards there will be no leave as there is a lot of work to do during those days.”***

I thanked Huzoor and said that three days were more than sufficient.

With the *Grace of Allah*, we enjoyed the next few days, where I was able to take my elder son to a Premier League football match for the first time and we also had very pleasant days out in Bath and London.

After the three days, I returned to work and reported for Mulaqat.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

***“I said that you could take four or five days and so I did not expect you would come back today.”***

Thereafter, Huzoor said:

***“Now you should be ready every day, as over the coming days, I will give you dictation for my addresses at the forthcoming Ijtemas and the USA tour.”***

### **A heart-rending comment**

On 6 September 2022, I reported for Mulaqat feeling very uneasy and worried. Huzoor had not led the prayers in the Mubarak Mosque since the night before.

It was clear he was not feeling well and so, irrespective of any work, I just wished to have the opportunity to see Huzoor and to enquire how he was feeling.

Despite not feeling well, Huzoor came to his office at the usual time and after a few minutes called me.

Upon entering, I was relieved to see that Huzoor seemed well, although perhaps a little fatigued. I asked him how he was.

Huzoor said:

***“Yesterday evening, shortly after I met you, the family Mulaqats started and after a few minutes I felt unwell and it continued to get worse throughout the session. By the end, I had to call Dr Shabir sahib.”***

I asked Huzoor why had he not called the doctor or stopped the Mulaqats as soon as he felt unwell.

Exhibiting his complete selflessness and pure love for the Jamaat members, Huzoor said:

***“Ahmadis had come from far away to meet me and I did not wish for any of them to be disappointed or to have to wait for a long period, as they had to travel back to their homes. So, even though I was feeling unwell, somehow, with Allah’s Help, I continued and was able to meet all of the families.”***

There were no family Mulaqats scheduled that evening and so I asked Huzoor if he would at least now rest.

In reply, Huzoor said:

***“I have to finalise my notes for the Khuddam Ijtema, then in a day or two I will start preparing my notes for the Lajna Ijtema and then there is preparation for the coming USA tour and so there is no time to rest.”***

I felt emotional and pained to see Huzoor unwell and to think of how the Khalifa-Waqt constantly set aside his own needs for the sake of the Jamaat and hid his pain.

I said:

***“Alhamdulillah, Huzoor, you continue to look well and your routine continues hardly without any change.”***

What Huzoor said next shook me and filled me with immense sadness.

Huzoor said:

”تم نہیں جانتے کہ میرے دل میں کیا تکلیف ہے۔ تم بس مجھے دیکھتے ہو اور سمجھتے ہو کہ سب ٹھیک ہے۔“

That:

***“You do not know the pain in my heart. You just look at me and think I am always well.”***

It seemed to me that Huzoor was not necessarily referring to physical ailments or pain.

Rather, it was a moment where Huzoor expressed the emotional anguish and grief he, as Khalifa-Waqt, feels as he observes the state of the world and the sorrows of those Ahmadis who are suffering.



## **The moment Huzoor heard of the Queen's death**

Late afternoon on 8 September 2022, I reported for Mulaqat. During the previous few hours, there had been rolling news coverage regarding the health of Queen Elizabeth.

Though nothing was confirmed, a contact had texted me stating that the Queen had died and that the official announcement would be made shortly.

I could not be sure if the information was correct but I did inform Huzoor at the start of my regular briefing that this was the information I had received.

I then presented the rest of my report to Huzoor.

Sometimes, it is evident from Huzoor's responses that he wishes for me to present quickly and it appeared to be the case that afternoon. Hence, I gave my report quickly within a few minutes.

Upon seeing that I had ended my report, Huzoor said:

"چلو پھر کام کرو۔"

That is:

***"Now do some work."***

In my mind, I assumed that Huzoor was instructing me to leave and continue with my regular work. So, I picked up my work file, offered 'salam' and turned to leave Huzoor's office.

Upon this, Huzoor asked:

"تم کہاں جا رہے ہو؟ میں نے کہا ہے کہ کام کرو اور تم چھٹی کر رہے ہو!"

Meaning:

***"Where are you going? I told you to work and instead you are taking leave!"***

For a moment, I was confused before realising that Huzoor wished to give dictation for an address he was to make at the Lajna UK National Ijtema!

The day before, Huzoor had mentioned to me that he might give dictation the following day but I had still failed to understand initially what he meant by 'Now, do some work'.

Thankfully, I had my laptop with me and quickly set it up and started to take dictation for Huzoor's address, which continued for the next hour.

Just after 6.30pm, whilst Huzoor was giving dictation, the Private Secretary, Munir Javed sahib entered Huzoor's office.

In my experience, when Huzoor is meeting someone in his office, it is rare for the Private Secretary to enter Huzoor's office without first being called by Huzoor. Hence, his entering meant it was something significant that he wished to convey.

As Huzoor looked up, the Private Secretary said:

***“The death of the Queen has just been officially announced to the nation.”***

After giving the news of the Queen's demise, the Private Secretary left the room.

At that moment, I felt fortunate to be present and to witness the reaction of Huzoor first hand, given this was the first time a British monarch had died since the time of the Second Khalifa.

As always, Huzoor's reaction was dignified and balanced.

Looking up, Huzoor said:

***“There was a photo of the Queen receiving the new Prime Minister just two days ago?”***

In reply, I said:

***“Yes, Huzoor. The Queen showed a lot of strength and served her country right until her death.”***

Huzoor acknowledged her fortitude before indicating that I should continue to take dictation.

The work of Khalifatul Masih and the Jamaat of the Promised Messiah (as) continues in all circumstances.

It was a lesson for me as well. Having grown up in England, I found myself feeling a little unsettled by the news of the death of the Queen.

Yet, being able to observe Huzoor's calm reaction settled me and within a moment, I was fully focused again on the work at hand.

Once Huzoor had completed the dictation for his address, he mentioned the Queen again.

He instructed that a statement of condolence on his behalf and behalf of the Jamaat should be issued without delay.

I asked Huzoor if the National Ijtema of Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya, which was due to start the next day, should go ahead as planned.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

***"In my view, unless there is any restriction by the government, there is no need to cancel the Ijtema."***

Later, Huzoor instructed *Sadr Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya UK*, Abdul Quddus Arif sahib, that the Ijtema could and should go ahead but that the sports events should be scaled down as a mark of respect.

In a subsequent Mulaqat, mentioning this particular instruction to me, Huzoor said:

***“The reason I told Sadr Sahib to cancel the sports events is that when games or sports take place, it is often not possible for young people to control their emotions and so they will be cheering loudly or passionately raising slogans (naaray) and such commotion might offend or hurt the sentiments of our neighbours.”***

Mid-morning on 11 September 2022, I was working at my desk in the *Press & Media Office* when I received a call from Private Secretary sahib that Huzoor wished to speak to me.

A moment later, the phone was connected and Huzoor said:

***“I think it is appropriate for me to mention the Queen in my address today at the Khuddam Ijtema and to appreciate the fact that during her reign, due to the religious freedom of this country, we were able to establish our Markaz.”***

Thus, over the next few minutes, Huzoor dictated a few lines over the phone with regard to the death of Queen Elizabeth, which I quickly printed and presented to Huzoor at Islamabad.

Huzoor went through the notes and edited a couple of sentences until satisfied and then added them to his previous notes.

*Alhamdulillah*, it was the first time that *Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya UK* was able to hold a full scale *Ijtema* since the start of the Covid pandemic. A tribute to the Queen was set up and this led to significant national media coverage.

The media reported on how thousands of Muslims had gathered together for their *Ijtema* and newspapers such as the *Evening Standard* and *The Independent* quoted Huzoor's words of tribute.

Over those few days, Huzoor taught and guided the Jamaat members on how to react when the death of a distinguished Head of State or leader occurs.

Through his own example and his instructions, Huzoor conveyed the importance of offering one's sympathies, showing respect and caring for the sentiments of all those who are affected.

At the same time, there was no need to stop everything or to manifest any form of pretence merely to impress others.

### **The need for patience & tolerance**

During Mulaqat, a few days before the USA tour, I mentioned to Huzoor that I had come to know of a *rishta* (marriage proposal) that had been sent to someone I knew.

The girl's family had mentioned that when they sought Huzoor's prayers and guidance, he had advised them to disclose a health issue the girl had suffered from when she was a child.

I mentioned to Huzoor that I did not realise that even such issues that were now long resolved ought to be disclosed when considering a proposal.

In reply, Huzoor said:

***“Yes, this is what is actually meant by ‘Qaul-e-Sadeed’ (‘the right word’) in the verses of the Quran recited before a Nikah – that both sides should be open and transparent so that there is no room later on for resentment or a belief that something was concealed.”***

Thereafter, Huzoor spoke more generally about how the divorce rate amongst Ahmadi had increased in recent years and expressed his regret that patience was no longer seen as a virtue by many.

Huzoor said:

***“It is extremely unfortunate that the threshold of patience and tolerance amongst Ahmadi husbands and wives is decreasing rapidly. You cannot imagine some of the things that young Ahmadi women write to me in complaint about their husbands or vice versa. They end their marriages over the most shallow or superficial things and without any willingness to try to persevere and work things out. Often, they are from righteous families, who for generations have had Ahmadiyyat steeped in their***

***blood, yet compared to the new converts they are far behind. It is very regretful.”***

Huzoor mentioned some types of complaints or issues that came directly to his desk. I was genuinely shocked and stunned.

Huzoor further said:

***“Ahmadis should seek to follow the example of the Promised Messiah (as) and Hazrat Amma Jaan (ra) and how they lived together as husband and wife. Theirs was a bond based on mutual love, patience and prayer.”***

Thereafter, Huzoor mentioned the example of an elderly lady who had come to meet him recently. It was someone who had faced extreme personal adversity in recent years.

Huzoor said:

***“When she visited me, she told me that people would say to her ‘You have been through so much and yet you seem fine’. She said she would respond by saying that she cries only in front of Allah the Almighty and not in front of any person. This is a righteous example and how it should be.”***

Huzoor said:

***“Certainly, this is my way as well that whenever I have any worry or anxiety, I turn to Allah and let out my emotions before Him alone.”***



## **Huzoor's use of the English language**

Perhaps to lighten the mood, Huzoor asked me how old I was.

I replied that I was now 39.

Upon this, Huzoor smiled and said:

***“In your work with me, you have experienced many things and have encountered an extremely diverse range of issues! You certainly would not have gained as many experiences if you had worked anywhere else!”***

Though, Huzoor's comment was light-hearted it was also most certainly true.

Huzoor also mentioned the address he had delivered at the Khuddam Ijtema a few days before.

Huzoor said:

***“I always try to use simple and easy to understand language in my addresses so that those whom I am addressing can understand it.”***

Smiling, Huzoor said:

***“You may wish that sometimes I would use more elaborate or formal language but my focus is on Tarbiyyat and not on winning any literary prize or seeking to impress anyone with my use of language.”***

Upon this, Huzoor also mentioned how he regularly read in English as well as Urdu.

Huzoor said:

***“Every morning, after Fajr, I not only read the Urdu commentary of the Holy Quran but I also read some of the English commentary as well. Apart from benefitting from the commentary itself, it also enables me to stay in touch with the English language.”***

I replied by saying that Huzoor’s command of the English language was excellent and that, many times, he had corrected my grammar and spelling or had mentioned an English phrase which I was not aware of, even though English was my first language.

Thereupon Huzoor said:

***“When I was young, I did not deliver speeches or do public speaking, hence sometimes now when speaking publicly the words I wish to use do not come immediately to the tip of my tongue.”***

Huzoor added:

***“In fact, sometimes after giving an interview or answering a question in a class, I think of an apt word or phrase and think that ‘I should have used that’, however, in everything, Allah’s Guiding Hand is present and so where He needs me to speak, He Himself helps and directs me.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“For example, when I was interviewed by Peter Mansbridge in Canada, I know that Allah the Almighty was guiding me and I know there are some Ahmadis who were more influenced by that interview than my Sermons or speeches to the Jamaat members. They gained confidence in their faith when they saw that Khalifatul Masih is speaking openly on the national TV about the virtues of Islam and the injustices and dangers in the world. It helped remove their complexes about Islamic teachings and emboldened them to speak the truth.”***

Upon hearing this, I said it was unfortunate if Ahmadis were more influenced by watching Huzoor speak on external platforms, rather than paying heed to when he addressed them directly.

In reply, Huzoor said:

***“We should never be rigid but should realise that Tarbiyyat of our Jamaat members can occur in many different ways. Allah the Almighty has not decreed for just one way to guide or reform mankind, rather there are different methods or means that work according to the nature of the individual. There is one goal and one objective – to bring people closer to God and for them to be good and righteous – but there are many different ways of reaching that objective.”***

Upon this, Huzoor smiled and said:

**”چلو پھر جاؤ۔ آج میں نے کافی لمبا لیکچر دے دیا ہے تمہیں۔“**

That:

***“You should go now, as today I have given you a long lecture!”***

The truth is that I could have listened to Huzoor’s ‘lecture’ all day. Each word was profound, exhibiting Huzoor’s personal humility and his complete trust in Allah and desire for Ahmadis to live up to the teachings of the Promised Messiah (as).

### **Preparing for America**

During the week before Huzoor’s travel to the USA, Huzoor also granted me the honour to take dictation for the guest receptions that were to take place in Zion and Dallas.

A few days before Huzoor prepared for the Zion address, I mentioned to him an article I had read in a national newspaper about King Charles and how he had, in the past, expressed a desire to be known as the ‘*defender of faith*’, rather than the ‘*defender of **the** faith*’ which had historically been one of the titles of the British monarch.

Referencing this, the headline of a column printed in *The Times* read: ‘*Playing nice to all religions may be wishful thinking*’.

When I mentioned the article, Huzoor did not say anything but he made a brief note on a notepad placed on his desk.

A few minutes later, after I had completed my report, Huzoor said:

***“I was contemplating earlier today about what to say in my address in Zion and then you mentioned this article in which they say it may not be possible for King Charles to be a true defender of all faiths. I think that this very point can be the basis of my address!”***

I was not exactly sure what Huzoor had in mind.

Thereafter, Huzoor explained further.

Huzoor said:

***“I shall make the point that the sentiments and intention of King Charles are very good and praiseworthy but that people are already speculating that it will be difficult for a Christian King to bring people together and to defend all faiths. On the other side, Islam’s teachings truly are universal wherein the Holy Quran asserts that Muslims are duty-bound to protect all religions and to be the defender of all faiths.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“I will quote chapter 22, verses 40-41 of the Holy Quran where it stipulates that if the Muslims in the time of the Holy Prophet (sa) did not fight back against the oppressors then no church, synagogue, temple or any other place of worship would be safe. This is the beauty and reality of Islam’s universal teachings. For Muslims, protecting and defending all religions is not ‘wishful thinking’, rather it is our religious obligation!”***

Such moments where one is able to directly witness the way Huzoor is inspired to write his addresses is extremely faith inspiring.

After mentioning what he planned to say, Huzoor said:

***“Do you think this will be sufficient?”***

Huzoor’s humility is also beyond measure. I am no one to give advice or opinion.

However, as Huzoor had asked, I replied:

***“I think this will be a perfect basis for the address.”***

I also mentioned that perhaps those attending or local Jamaat members in the USA would expect that Huzoor would mention Alexander Dowie and the *mubahila* challenge (*prayer duel*) of the Promised Messiah (as) in his address.

In response, Huzoor said:

***“I will mention the case of Dowie in my Friday Sermon where I am addressing the Jamaat members directly of how it was a great sign of the truth of the Promised Messiah (as). However, in terms of the reception address to guests, it is important to speak considerately. We should not emphasise that this was a great victory of Islam over Christianity when speaking with guests because it could hurt their sentiments or feelings.***

***To be careful and wise in speech is not deceitful, rather this is what the Quran teaches us when it states 'Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation'.***

Huzoor continued:

***"Hence, in my address to guests, rather than speak about it being a great victory for Islam, I would focus more on how the Promised Messiah (as) sought to reason with Dowie and only when he had gone beyond all limits in his attacks on Islam and the Holy Prophet (sa) did the Promised Messiah (as) challenge him to a prayer duel. I will mention that where Dowie talked of a war between Muslims and Christians, the Promised Messiah's (as) weapon was prayer, and that remains our weapon today and always will be."***

Over the next few days, Huzoor gave dictation for both the Zion and Dallas addresses. I printed and handed in the Zion address a few days before travel.

I asked Huzoor if it would be permissible to hand in the print out of the Dallas address during the travel to the USA.

In reply, in a light way, Huzoor said:

***"Why do you want to delay it? If you are worried about packing your suitcases then you can easily do that in two hours! So, hand it in before we go."***

Though I had initially hoped to hand it in later, Huzoor's instruction proved to be a blessing. I was able to complete the work and submit it before the travel, rather than to have it play on my mind during the journey itself.

Huzoor was right about the packing too! As I had not travelled for a long time and was out of practice, I thought it would take very long to pack and get ready but, in reality, it was all done within a couple of hours!

### **Prayers for Allah's Protection**

Late afternoon, a day before Huzoor's travel, on Sunday 25 September, I reported to Mulaqat.

Huzoor came to his office at the normal time and so upon entering, I said:

***"Huzoor, I thought that today you might come late to the office as you would be packing and getting ready for the journey."***

In reply, Huzoor said:

***"I did a little packing last night but I do not have that much to pack, mainly just some shalwar kameez and achkans (traditional overcoats) and most of it is done by my wife."***

Throughout the Mulaqat, Huzoor seemed relaxed and happy. There had been some concerns about the forthcoming tour in terms of security and certain other things, yet Huzoor did not seem at all perturbed.



A few days before, someone had mentioned to me the example of the Holy Prophet (sa) that once he had made a firm intention to go forth with an expedition and had put on his armour.

When some of his companions raised concerns, the Holy Prophet (sa) did not waver and placed his trust in Allah.

Seeing Huzoor's relaxed countenance it was clear that, even though there were a few people who wondered if this was an appropriate time for Huzoor to travel abroad, having made the decision, Huzoor had placed his trust in Allah the Almighty and was looking forward to the travel ahead.

As the Mulaqat came to an end, Huzoor mentioned that the weather in Chicago and Zion where Huzoor was flying to and staying initially seemed to be similar to the weather in the UK.

I mentioned that Chicago was known as the 'windy city' of America.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

***"I hope there is not too much turbulence on the flight."***

I mentioned that Farhad Ahmad, a Murrabi, who had travelled in advance to the United States as part of the *Press* and *MTA* team had mentioned to me that there had been a great deal of turbulence on his flight.

I further said:

*“Huzoor, normally, if there is turbulence on a flight I get quite anxious but when we are travelling with you then we know that, Insha’Allah, everything will be fine.”*

In response, Huzoor said:

*“No matter what or no matter who is travelling, we should always just pray that Allah keeps us in His protection.”*

### **Melancholic to electric - a sudden change in atmosphere**

As I left Huzoor’s office, I looked forward to the next day with a mixture of nerves, happiness and a great sense of anticipation. However, as I walked through the Islamabad complex I felt a sense of deep sadness amongst the many Ahmadis who either lived within the complex or nearby.

After several years, Huzoor was leaving them for some time and the atmosphere of Islamabad was bound to be one of relative quiet and sadness for a few weeks.

Just as I was about to go home, I suddenly noticed that the melancholic atmosphere had suddenly changed and there were smiles on the faces of the local Ahmadis. I saw others rushing out from their homes.

No doubt, sensing how the local Ahmadis would miss him, Huzoor had graciously come out of his office to meet them.

In a matter of moments, Islamabad was lined with many Ahmadi men, women and children all desperate and eager to see Huzoor.

First Huzoor went to the grave of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) and offered a silent prayer.

Thereafter, Huzoor walked along the line of Ahmadis.

Khuddam raised *naaray* (slogans), whilst the tender, innocent voices of very young infants reciting the Kalima could be heard.

Huzoor distributed chocolates to every single child and waved to the Ahmadis and responded to their *salam* most lovingly.



After a few minutes, Huzoor returned to his office.

As he did, a Khadim, overcome with joy at seeing Huzoor said:

***“Huzoor knew! Huzoor just knew how sad we are feeling that he is leaving and so he came out and the atmosphere completely changed! It was electric!”***

With that, I returned to my home and got ready for the journey ahead.

### **Departure from Islamabad**

Almost three years since his last foreign travel, on 26 September 2022, the day of Huzoor’s tour of the United States had arrived.

Before leaving for Islamabad, I managed to do the school run and drop both of my sons to their schools. One of them was in tears, whilst the other didn’t even look back and ran into his classroom without a second glance!

At 10.30am, my wife Mala and daughter Jaweria dropped me at Islamabad. I handed in my two suitcases to the security guards who were collecting all of the luggage at one place and then spent the next couple of hours feeling as if the nervous energy within me was increasing minute by minute!

At 11.50am, a first group of Qafila members, which comprised the entire group except for Huzoor, Khala Saboohi and me departed from Islamabad.

Then, at 1pm, Huzoor came out of his residence and walked towards the crowds of Ahmadis who had gathered to see him off and waved at them before leading a silent prayer.



The prayer was long and surely Huzoor was praying that the journey proves blessed in all respects.



Thereafter, Huzoor took a seat in his car and departed from Islamabad to Heathrow Airport.



I was seated in a car directly in front of Huzoor, along with Amir Sahib UK and Mirza Waqas Ahmad sahib, who were travelling to the airport to see off Huzoor.

We arrived at the airport at 1.40pm and Huzoor and Khala Saboohi remained in an airport lounge for about 45 minutes.

### **Boarding the Flight**

At 2.35pm, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi passed through security without incident but when it came to my turn I beeped, even though I had taken everything out of my pockets and removed my belt.

Due to the 'beep', I had to have a full body scan, whilst Huzoor stood a few metres ahead observing. I felt nervous and anxious that any delay on my part was delaying Huzoor.

To my relief I was cleared a moment later and passed through to where Huzoor was waiting.

Huzoor noticed then that I was carrying his passport in my hand and said that it must have been that which had caused the beep.

Huzoor said:

***"You should have placed it in the tray before passing through security."***

Upon this, I replied:

***“I did not want to risk misplacing Huzoor’s passport.”***

As we left the terminal, I asked if I could carry Huzoor’s briefcase and bag, which he graciously permitted.

It was a duty that I was able to continue through various stages of the tour and a great honour. At the same time, I was constantly fearful that I did not misplace or damage Huzoor’s bags.

I also had my own bag, which was identical to one of Huzoor’s own bags. It had been a gift from Huzoor and so, often, I would hold Huzoor’s bag in one hand and my own in the other hand and I kept worrying that I would mix them up but thankfully I was able to keep track.

As we left the terminal, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi took a seat in a car which was to drive us to the boarding area for *United Airlines Flight 959* from Heathrow to Chicago.

I took a seat in the front passenger seat. It had been many years since I had the opportunity to sit in a car with Huzoor and so those few minutes, at the very start of the journey, were extremely precious.

As we drove towards the plane, Huzoor mentioned overnight news that the pound had fallen steeply against the dollar, following the so-called ‘*mini-budget*’ announced by the newly appointed Prime Minister Liz Truss and her Chancellor.

Commenting on the economic turmoil, Huzoor said:

***“It is not just linked to the new budget but the way the pound is falling is also a result of the Ukraine war. The war has (negatively) affected UK and Europe’s economies much more than it is affecting the US. The US Government knows and understands this.”***

I responded by saying that the pound crashing against the dollar meant it was very unlikely I would be doing any shopping in America!

In response, Huzoor said:

***“Perhaps you will still be able to find something reasonable.”***

As we neared the plane, Huzoor said:

***“اس دورہ پر یہ نہ سوچو کہ صرف پریس کا کام کرنا ہے۔ تمہیں دوسرے کام بھی کرنے پڑیں گے۔”***

That:

***“On this trip, don’t think you will only be doing press duties, you will have to do other jobs as well.”***

It sounded as though Huzoor was referring to some personal errands or duties.



I responded by saying:

***“Any opportunity to serve (Huzoor) will be a great blessing of Allah upon me.”***

Huzoor smiled but did not say anything further. With all my heart, I hoped and prayed that I would have the chance to serve Huzoor but also felt a deep trepidation that I should not make any mistake or do anything that could cause Huzoor any displeasure or discomfort.

As we boarded the plane, Munum Naeem sahib, who was waiting at the entrance, showed Huzoor to his seat. Munum sahib had identified a seat with a bit more legroom for Huzoor. However, Huzoor indicated to Khala Saboohi to take that seat and took the seat with less legroom for himself.

It was a silent gesture and one that no one else will have noticed except me, as I was standing directly behind Huzoor, but it was a beautiful example of how Huzoor is a true reflection of Islamic teachings to care for and protect one’s family.

### **Failing to unlock**

Before taking a seat, Huzoor sought to take something out of his briefcase. However, the lights in the plane were switched off for some reason and he was unable to see the numbers on his briefcase to unlock it.

Thus, Huzoor told me the code and told me to unlock it. I tried to turn the numbers according to the code but I also could not see the numbers properly.

I switched on the torch of my phone to boost the light but still it was very difficult to read. I felt my hands turn to jelly, as Huzoor waited.

By now I was so nervous that even if all the lights in the world had been switched on, I probably still would have failed to accomplish that most trivial task.

Though it was probably less than a minute, it felt as though many minutes had passed, as I frantically turned the number dial according to the code. In the end, Huzoor took out his glasses and turned the dial and unlocked the briefcase.

As he did so, Huzoor looked at me and said:

"تم تو ابھی سے گھبرائے ہو!"

That:

***"You have become nervous already!"***

I felt very embarrassed and for the rest of the journey I kept thinking of how a few moments before, Huzoor had indicated that I may assist him during the tour and on the very first occasion I had come up short. I prayed a lot that during the rest of the tour I would be able to serve in a better way.

### **A few moments on the plane**

With the Grace of Allah, the flight departed at 3.30pm UK time, and despite warnings from the Captain that turbulence was expected, the flight remained smooth throughout.

*Alhamdulillah*, during the journey, I had the opportunity to speak to Huzoor a few times.

At one point, Huzoor walked towards where I was seated and he asked how the journey was going. I asked if he was comfortable and able to rest. In reply, Huzoor smiled and said that he was not travelling to the USA for rest!

Munum Naeem sahib was also seated nearby and he also asked Huzoor how he was and if he needed anything. Again, Huzoor smiled and said that he was ok and we should not worry.

A little while later, Munum sahib asked me to take some blankets and pillows forward and to offer them to Huzoor and Khala Saboohi.

I was conscious of repeatedly approaching Huzoor and disturbing him but it was quite cold on the plane and so I took the pillows and blankets forward and offered them. However, neither Huzoor nor Khala Saboohi required them.

After a couple of hours, I realised that it was possible to connect to the airplane *Wi-Fi* and use it for messaging. It was a very slow connection and it was not possible to download photos or open any websites but it was sufficient to receive and send text messages on WhatsApp or iMessage.

Given that there were still several hours of the flight ahead, I walked towards where Huzoor was seated. I was not sure if he was resting and so waited a few moments until I was sure that Huzoor was awake.

I then approached Huzoor and mentioned that there was basic *Wi-Fi* available.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

***“What is the need for Wi-Fi?”***

In reply, I said:

***“I am mentioning just in case Huzoor wished to check his messages or contact home.”***

Thereupon, Huzoor took his phone and asked how to connect. It was a slow process with several steps but after a few minutes, Huzoor was able to connect and I returned to my seat.

Having failed to help Huzoor open his briefcase earlier, I felt partially redeemed having managed to get the *Wi-Fi* working!

Towards the end of the flight, Huzoor once again stretched his legs and graciously came to where I was seated.

As I stood up, Huzoor said:

***“The flight attendant just came and asked me if I wanted anything to eat or drink. I told him that I did not wish for anything but that he should ask my staff members as they might be hungry.”***

Hearing this, I felt extremely humbled witnessing Huzoor’s affection and grace towards those who were accompanying him.

Thereafter a few minutes later, the flight attendant did approach me and said:

***“I have asked His Holiness and his wife several times if they need anything and each time they said they were fine and didn’t need anything. They both seem so humble, polite and kind.”***

He continued:

***“Sometimes, we get famous people or dignitaries come on our planes but normally they do not take the time to speak to us. However, His Holiness spoke to me several times very kindly and it was a real privilege. Whereas other VIP guests are often very demanding, he is just so down to earth. Seeing the way he is, I wish to serve and help him.”***

As on many previous occasions, I saw how the personality and humility of Khalifa-Waqt proved a means of impressing those who have no affiliation or link to Islam or the Jamaat.

### **Arrival in USA**

After around eight hours and twenty minutes, at 5.50pm local time, the flight landed at Chicago's O'Hare International airport.

Within a few moments, Huzoor got up to exit the plane. As he got up, I noticed that some of Huzoor's personal belongings lay on the side table. Just as he was about to walk forward, Huzoor looked back, saw them and picked both up.

As he turned to me, Huzoor said:

***"I almost forgot these things."***

In reply, I said:

***"Huzoor, I had seen them and was going to get them."***

Huzoor smiled and seemed pleased that I was also keeping an eye.

Then, a moment later, I was lucky to be standing behind Huzoor as he exited the plane.

That moment where Khalifa-Waqt takes his first step in a new country, a new continent, is always extremely special and observing it from close quarters was a great privilege.

Huzoor was welcomed at the entrance of the plane by the Ameer Jamaat USA, Dr. Mirza Maghfoor Ahmad sahib and the Naib Amir, Dr. Nasim Rehmatullah sahib.

Thereupon, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi were escorted to a nearby lounge, where Huzoor was welcomed by various airport and airline officials, as well as Commander William Mullane, Lieutenant of Chicago Police Department.

The other members of the Qafila were all instructed to go to the main immigration hall.

As Huzoor entered the lounge, because I was carrying his briefcase, I asked a police officer who was assigned to our group if I was permitted to go into the lounge with Huzoor. However, he said it was not possible and I should go to the main immigration hall with the rest of the Qafila members.

I had no plan to argue with a US police officer whose gun was large and very visible and so I stood to the side with the rest of our group!

After a moment, I heard the police officer raise his voice and say:

***“Where’s that guy gone? The staff member?”***

At first, I was not sure who he was referring to.

He then raised his voice further and, by now, was shouting:

***“Where’s that guy – the guy with the bags?”***

As soon as he said *'the guy with the bags'*, I realised he was referring to me! He thought I had defied his orders and had followed Huzoor into the lounge. The police officer was charged up!

Anyway, I raised my hand and said:

***"I am here."***

As soon as he saw that I had not actually defied his orders and was standing exactly where I was meant to be, a look hinting slight embarrassment, mixed with a half-smile, took hold on his face.

The police officer said:

***"Oh ok, you're right here! That's fine then!"***

Thereafter, the police officer and an immigration official took us down to the main immigration hall.

### **Khan sahib's fingerprints**

One by one, our passports were checked and our fingerprints were taken. It was a smooth process but myself and a few other Qafila members could not help but laugh because, for some reason, when it came to Mahmood Khan sahib's turn, his finger prints were not registering.

For the record, Mahmood Khan sahib has the biggest hand and fingers of any person I know.



In fact, someone once told me that when Khan sahib was a child, it was common in his village in Pakistan for car tires to be rolled over children's hands in order to stretch them and encourage growth! I have no idea if this true but it would not necessarily surprise me!

Despite several attempts, his finger prints were not registering on the scanner. The first time, he smiled but, each time, he would place his finger prints down and the officer would tell him to 'press harder', he would become a little redder. I could sense as his frustration was building. He kept pressing down upon the biometric scanner with increasing force.

Finally, at about the seventh or eighth attempt, his finger prints were recognised by the scanner and his passport was stamped by the immigration official.

### **A safe and blessed arrival**

It took about twenty minutes for all of us to get our passports stamped and, once done, we were taken to the main entrance of the airport where several Ahmadis, including the National Missionary-in-charge, Azhar Hanif sahib, were waiting anxiously to receive Huzoor.

Also present, was Dr Bilal Rana sahib, the National Umoor-e-Ama Secretary, who has battled quite severe ill-health over the past year. Despite being clearly unwell, Dr Bilal sahib had travelled 1100 miles by car, over two days, from Texas to be present at that moment to receive Huzoor.

A few moments later, at 6.40pm, Huzoor was escorted from the lounge where he had been waiting to the main entrance. He waved and offered *salam* to the Ahmadis who had come to receive him before walking a few metres to the main exit where the Qafila cars were lined up.



*Alhamdulillah*, Huzoor had safely arrived in the USA and soon departed for Zion, where he would reside for the first week.

Though, it had been a long journey and despite it being well after midnight UK time, Huzoor seemed fresh and well.

The National Umur-e-Kharija Secretary for the USA Jamaat, Amjad Khan told me later of how Huzoor's reception at the airport was itself a sign of the continued support and help of Allah the Almighty for Khilafat.

Amjad Khan said:

***"This is the fourth U.S. tour of Huzoor in which I was able to witness first hand Allah's magnificent grace. I observed the special manner in which Allah opened the doors of respect and courtesy shown to Huzoor by the U.S. Government. In the final week leading up to Huzoor's arrival, we had not been able to secure the same courtesies that we had obtained in 2018 due to a variety of pandemic-related and personnel changes in the intervening four years."***

Amjad continued:

***"Even in the final days leading up to Huzoor's arrival, I had such anxiety over the grant of security waivers for entry that I wrote to Huzoor that I did not feel we would be able to achieve it. But in the final hours before Huzoor's arrival at O'Hare Airport, we obtained such unconditional support and service from the Department of Homeland Security that I was truly astonished at the ease by which Allah created the entry for Huzoor and his wife. I knew that none of the meagre efforts we had put forward had proven effective, and that Allah Himself protected the honour and ease of the Khalifa of the time. Even one of the main Customs and Border officers expressed how grateful he was for the 'opportunity of a lifetime' to meet Huzoor at the airport."***

I have written before and it remains the case, that Huzoor never expresses any desire for any protocol or ease.

Yet, as Ahmadis, we desire that the Khalifa-Waqt is treated with respect and honour and, as Amjad expressed, I too have seen on many occasions how it seems as though Allah the Almighty has *Himself* protected the honour of the

Khalifa-Waqt and softened the hearts of relevant officials and they come to recognise it to be their good fortune to receive Huzoor.

Indeed, on the car journey to Zion, Munum Naeem sahib mentioned how one official who had received Huzoor on behalf of United Airlines in Chicago had commented after receiving Huzoor:

***“I must have done something good in my life to meet such a holy man”.***

### **A spine-tingling arrival**

The journey from Chicago to Zion was approximately 50 miles and took an hour. As we drove from the airport we were surrounded by a multitude of sky scrapers but those sky scrapers soon gave way to a much smaller town feel as we approached Zion.

Though it is a small city, as soon as we entered Zion, it felt steeped in history, given how this was the place from where a great sign of the truth of the Promised Messiah (as) came to pass.

The Qafila drove straight to the newly built Fath-e-Azeem Mosque, which Huzoor was due to inaugurate later in the week.

More than 1100 Ahmadis had gathered to welcome Huzoor and, as he arrived, just after 7.40pm, and stepped out from his car, the sounds were truly deafening.

The joyful emotions and pure elation amongst the Ahmadi men, women and children of the United States reverberated around the Mosque premises. It was a spine-tingling moment.

It felt like a release of emotion as the local Ahmadis were able to see their spiritual leader, their guide, their beloved after many years. Alhamdulillah.



After a few moments, Huzoor went to his residence briefly before returning to lead the Maghreb and Isha prayers in the Mosque.

After Namaz, Huzoor returned to his residence for the evening, whilst the rest of us were taken to our respective accommodations.

### **Jet lag and an early breakfast**

The office staff, including me, were staying at a nearby hotel called '*The Inn on Sheridan*'. By the time we got there, I was shattered! I unpacked a few things before laying down wondering what jet lag had in store for me!

I went to sleep just before midnight and by 3am, I was wide awake again. Fajr was not until around 6am and so I tried to get back to sleep but I couldn't as I was really, really hungry! Thankfully, the USA Jamaat hosts had placed some snacks in our room, including a *Costco* fruit and nut energy bar, which got me through the night!

Along with Mubarak Zafar sahib, I went to the Mosque for Fajr prayer. Our driver throughout our stay in Zion was Akber Ali, a relative of mine who lived in Chicago.

Even though it was bitterly chilly, the Mosque was full and Ahmadis, including women and children, lined up to wave to Huzoor as he entered and exited the Mosque. They waved with gusto and offered *salam* loudly, all desperate that Huzoor would see them. To as many people as possible, Huzoor waved back and replied to their *salam* affectionately. It was a scene that would be repeated throughout the tour.

After Namaz, I returned to the hotel and, the effect of the *Costco* bar, had by now worn off. I was with Nadeem Amini, a friend of mine from England, who had been given permission by Huzoor to join the Qafila in the United States. He was similarly hungry and, as there was no sign of breakfast yet at the hotel, he confidently said that he would find us something to eat.

We took a step out of the hotel and saw several coffee shops or restaurants across the road but they were all closed. This did not deter Nadeem, who walked to one café called '*Healthy Yums*'. It was closed and according to the timings listed on the window was not due to open for another hour. Yet, Nadeem noticed that there was someone inside cleaning the tables and so he started waving. A woman came to ask what he wanted and somehow Nadeem persuaded her to open the restaurant an hour early!

It was a small family run diner with a strong Christian tradition, which was apparent from various quotes of the Bible that were displayed prominently on the walls.

I ordered '*sour cherry pancakes*' with coffee and when they came they were truly American size! I immediately gave one pancake to a member of the Hifazat-Khas team who had by then joined us. I thought I would only manage half of the remaining pancake but it was so delicious that somehow I ate it all! After that, if I did not eat anything else all day, I would have been good!

### **Inspection of Exhibition and Mosque complex**

After breakfast, we got ready and returned to the Mosque by mid-morning, where the local Jamaat had kindly arranged for an office in which Majid sahib, Mubarak Zafar sahib and I were able to work throughout our stay in Zion.

At 1pm, Huzoor visited a special exhibition that had been made at the Mosque regarding the Promised Messiah's (as) *mubahila* challenge with Alexander Dowie.



A great deal of work and research had been done to set up the exhibition, which was partly made up of artefacts and partly digital.

Anwar Khan sahib and his son Amjad Khan sahib had the honour to introduce the exhibition to Huzoor.



The exhibition explained who Dowie was and how and why he had founded Zion. It included a letter the Promised Messiah (as) had written warning Dowie which was published in the Review of Religions.

It also had digital records of around 160 newspapers that published news of the Promised Messiah's (as) challenge all across the United States and beyond. An original hard copy of one newspaper report about the Mubahila was also displayed.



The exhibition also had a large, 7-foot wide framed print of the famous *Boston Herald* headline pronouncing ‘Great is Mirza Ghulam Ahmad the Messiah’, which was authenticated and provided by the Boston Public Library.

Also on display, was a blessed tan coloured long coat belonging to the Promised Messiah (as).



Also present was a young Khadim, Ibrahim Ijaz, who had been one of the key researchers for the exhibition. The experience of researching and bringing the exhibition to fruition and ultimately having it graced by the presence of Huzoor had proved a very faith inspiring journey for him.

Afterwards, Ibrahim told me:

***“I cannot properly describe that moment when Huzoor entered the exhibition in Zion. That moment I had been thinking about for 7 months, constantly worrying about whether or not we could make something that would please our beloved Imam. Seeing Huzoor’s blessed face at that moment though wiped away all my anxieties and worries.”***

Speaking about a comment Huzoor made during his visit, Ibrahim said:

***“When Huzoor approached the display about Zion and Dowie, I heard Huzoor mention that, just as the Pharaoh’s body was saved as a sign of the truthfulness of the Prophet Moses (as), similarly this preservation was being done with respect to Dowie as a sign of the truth of the Promised Messiah (as). Hearing this, I remembered how in one of our first exhibition committee meetings a concern was raised about whether displaying Dowie’s artefacts would prove a means of elevating the reputation of one whom Allah the Almighty had left humiliated. Thus, it served as a great source of encouragement and comfort when Huzoor mentioned Pharaoh and this deep and profound point increased our knowledge and alleviated any such concerns.”***

After visiting the exhibition, Huzoor proceeded outside and unveiled a plaque to commemorate the inauguration of the Fath-e-Azeem Mosque and led the Jamaat members in a silent prayer.

Huzoor also laid foundation stone for a Minaret to be built at the Mosque, which will, *Insha’Allah*, be built to resemble the *Minaratul Masih* in Qadian.

Thereafter, Huzoor inspected the rest of the Mosque complex before returning to the Mosque to lead the Zuhr and Asr prayers.

### **Interview with RNS**

Later that afternoon, on 27 September 2022, Huzoor was interviewed by journalist Emily Miller from the *Religion News Service (RNS)* at the Fath-e-Azeem Mosque.

The journalist first asked Huzoor why he deemed it ‘important’ to personally travel to Zion to inaugurate the Mosque.



In response, Huzoor said:

***“Wherever we open Mosques, the local communities (Jamaats) in that country ask me if it is possible for me to come and open the Mosque. In Germany, UK and elsewhere, before Covid, I used to travel to open Mosques. However, here there is one special reason – as you will have seen from the exhibition that surrounds us.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“When I open Mosques, I am able to meet the members of our community. It encourages them and enables me to advise them about the true purpose of Mosques. I advise them that we should not just celebrate the opening, rather we should remember that the purpose of our life, according to our belief and religion, is to worship Allah and our Mosques are built to fulfil this purpose. I remind them that they should not just be happy that the construction of the Mosque is complete, rather they should realise and recognise the real purpose of their lives. In this way, they are encouraged, motivated and charged to change themselves and to recognise what their religious duties are.”***

The journalist asked Huzoor about the name of the Mosque ‘Fath-e-Azeem’ and what it meant.

In reply, Huzoor said:

***“You see, Fath-e-Azeem means ‘the Great Victory’. If you look around this exhibition you would learn how the prayer duel of the Messiah of the Muhammad (as) and the so-called Messiah (Dowie) started... It was not***

***the victory of any (one) religion, actually it is the victory of telling the people that who is the true man of God and that we should not use any abusive language against each other. We should respect all religions. This is what the teaching of the Quran says and this is what the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community said. The main purpose of a human being is to worship Allah and so whatever your religion, you should practice according to that. However, you must not use filthy or abusive language against other people.”***

The journalist asked Huzoor what he hoped people would learn from the story of Alexander Dowie.

In reply, Huzoor said:

***“You see, our work is to convey the true message of Islam and the Holy Quran says that there is no compulsion in religion and that you cannot force anybody to change their religion – but that you should keep doing your work (Tabligh). Those who do not accept Islam, at least, they will realise what Islam’s teachings are – that it asks people to live together amicably and to discharge the duties they owe to one another.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community stated the purpose of his coming is to bring the people of the world before Allah. He came to teach mankind why and how they should worship Allah. Secondly, he came to make people realise the duties they owe to each other – that people should respect one another and each other’s beliefs. This is what***

***the Quran teaches and this is what we firmly believe. This is what we practice and what we preach. So, these are things that we hope people will learn from the story.”***

As the interview came to an end, the journalist mentioned that across the world people were “*leaving organised religion*” and asked if Huzoor felt there was still a role for religion and whether it can be considered a means of peace.

In reply, Huzoor stated that there was clearly a role for religion in society but that nothing could be successfully accomplished by using force, rather the means to win the trust of people was by appealing to their hearts and minds.

Huzoor said:

***“The purpose of religion is not to create fear or to scare any person. As I have already said the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community came to revive Islam and the basis of his message was to make people realise their duties they owe to their Creator and to their fellow beings. If a person understands these two duties, then there is no need to fear (religion). We are never going to use force. Whenever we preach, we never say to others that they must accept (Islam) otherwise we shall retaliate. We are not like the fanatic Mullahs or extremists who are disturbing the peace of society. Rather, we say that we must all live peacefully and respect each other.”***

### **A miraculous escape**

Following the interview, Huzoor held a session of 'Family Mulaqats', in which he met members of the nearby Jamaats. Priority was given to those who had never met Huzoor before or who had not met him for many years.

As the Mulaqats took place, I happened to meet a young Missionary, Musawar Ahmad, who had been appointed as Missionary to El Paso near the US-Mexico border just over a year before.

I had heard he had been the victim of an attack some months earlier but had thankfully escaped physically unharmed. I asked him what had happened.

He told me about how, soon after he had been posted to El Paso, and before his wife had joined him in Texas, he was shot at several times by a gunman as he was sitting in his car. Somehow, the bullets missed and he was able to flee the vehicle but even then the gunman tried to fire at him. He told how he thought "*it was my time*" but he kept running until he reached safety. Despite being the victim, he was kept in jail overnight as police tried to figure out what had happened.

Later police informed him that he had been fired upon by a drug dealer who had killed another drug dealer and upon seeing Musawar, fired upon him as well, perhaps thinking he had witnessed his crime or thinking he was an associate of the other party. It was a truly chilling and harrowing story.

I asked Musawar how he had coped and if he was now doing ok.

In reply, Musawar said:

***“It took me several months to get over what happened and the only reason I’m ok is due to Huzoor’s love, concern and prayers for me. After the incident, Huzoor graciously phoned me and told me that there are certain times and situations where a person remains alive solely due to Allah’s Protection and what had happened to me was an example of that. Thus, Huzoor advised me to deepen my connection with Allah and to thank Him for saving me.”***

Musawar continued:

***“Apart from that, just hearing Huzoor’s voice calmed me down. And Huzoor even made some light comments which made me feel better. He gave me guidance about looking forward and how to move on.”***

Musawar told me all of this as he held his seven-month-old son in his arms. I could not comprehend how frightened he must have been or how traumatic the attack was but, Masha’Allah, the young Murrabi and his family remained patient.

He did not request for a transfer to a safer location but continued to seek to spread the message of Islam in the same place where he was attacked.

He mentioned how Huzoor’s love had given him the ability to move past what had happened and throughout the remainder of the tour, I saw how on several occasions, Huzoor would see Musawar standing as he walked by and would meet him with love and affection and bless his young child by touching him with the ring of the Promised Messiah (as).





### **Recovering from a mother's loss**

Another person, who I met that day in Zion was Razi-ullah Noman, a recent graduate of Jamia Ahmadiyya Canada. He had come to Zion with his elder brother Jery-ullah, who was to assist me later in the tour with some of my work.

Their mother had passed away a few months earlier after a short illness and so I took the opportunity to offer my condolences.

Upon this, Razi told me how since his mother's passing he had been struggling emotionally a great deal. He said her loss had unquestionably

been the greatest trial he had faced in his life. He spoke movingly of how it felt as though *“a mountain had fallen on us and we had no way of survival”*.

His respected mother, the late Nusrat Qadir sahiba from Canada Jamaat, had died in July and a few weeks later, Huzoor paid tribute to her in a Friday Sermon. As we stood outside the Mosque, Razi spoke of how ever since his mother’s passing he had struggled to focus and concentrate on anything, including his prayers. For Razi, the opportunity to pray behind Huzoor in Zion and to see him walk to and from the Mosque had proved transformative.

Razi said:

***“After my mother’s passing, I continued to be in a great deal of pain and could hardly live a normal day. I never stopped praying or lost faith but I was struggling to concentrate. However, Huzoor’s presence has already changed this. My prayers have been elevated behind him and I have found that focus and spirituality of prayer once again.”***

He told me how his mother always told him to obey Khalifatul Masih no matter what.

Razi said:

***“My mother’s condition was such that when she was in hospital, others would play music or watch movies to pass the time but she would always tell us to play Huzoor’s most recent Friday Sermon. Hence, as I saw Huzoor in Zion, my mother’s words (about obeying Khilafat) were in front of me and it felt like they were the best prayers of my life because it***

***reaffirmed that even after losing my mother, I still had someone – Khalifa-Waqt – there for me. In fact, now after her passing I realise even more how important her instructions to us were that we should always obey the Khalifa-Waqt – because, where we thought we would never find anywhere else the love a mother gives, we found it in Khilafat.”***

### **A measured response**

On Wednesday 28 September, Huzoor graciously met Ahmadi Muslims in Family Mulaqats throughout the day.

In the morning, I also had the opportunity to meet Huzoor for a few moments, during which Huzoor mentioned the media interview he had conducted the day before with RNS.

Smiling, Huzoor said:

***“Due to the journalist’s accent, I was unable to hear her questions properly and so I was not clear on what she was asking but I think the answers I gave were according to the questions!”***

Huzoor further said:

***“I think some of the local Jamaat Media team members may have been expecting me to speak in a more triumphalist fashion about Dowie and the victory of Islam. However, my answers were purposely measured and I spoke about the importance of respecting all Prophets and religions.***

***That is the message which is important to reinforce to others – about the need for unity and mutual respect in society.”***

### **Group Mulaqats**

Later in the day, Huzoor also graciously graced two separate ‘Group Mulaqats’ with Ahmadi men and Ahmadi ladies.

During the men’s Mulaqat, Ahmadis, young and old, had the chance to meet Huzoor, to tell their backgrounds, to mention any problems they had and to seek his prayers.

Very lovingly and patiently, Huzoor listened to each person and prayed for them as they told their aspirations in terms of their education, careers and family life.



Some told with great pride of how their elders or relatives had been martyred in the cause of Ahmadiyyat.

Some requested prayers that they would find a suitable marriage partner, whilst others informed that they had been married for many years but had been unable to conceive and sought Huzoor's prayers that they be blessed with children.

One man was very emotional as he informed Huzoor that his daughter had not been able to conceive for many years but she continued to write to Huzoor for prayers and, finally, after 15 years of marriage she had been blessed with a child.

During a group meeting with members of Lajna, one lady informed Huzoor how both her parents had passed away this year within a short period. In reply, Huzoor prayed for her deceased parents and prayed that her and all of their family members were granted peace and patience.

Another lady, very happily informed Huzoor of how, after six years of struggle, she had been blessed with her first child. In reply, Huzoor prayed for her good health and that Allah granted her more children.

Some women informed Huzoor they had qualified in various professions, such as doctors or teachers. Huzoor encouraged them, especially those who were members of the Waqf-e-Nau scheme, to offer their services in Jamaat hospitals or schools in Africa or Pakistan.

Other women, sought Huzoor's prayers that their children grew to be firm in their faith and proved to be true servants of Ahmadiyyat.

## **From Pizza to Prayer**

The blessed effect of Huzoor's presence was not just felt amongst those who met him directly but also the many volunteers or Ahmadis who were coming to the Mosque to pray behind Huzoor.

The long-term effects of Huzoor's previous visit to the United States were also apparent.

One person who did security duty throughout Huzoor's visit was *Zeeshan Qamar*, a 27-year-old Khadim.

That evening in Zion, he told me how Huzoor's previous tour of the United States in 2018 had proved a real turning point in his life.

Zeeshan said:

***"As I went through late teens and in my early 20s, if I am honest, I was moving away from faith and religion. Even when I was a Tifl, I remember that sometimes I would be at the Mosque playing sports or games but when it was time for Namaz, I would go and hide in the toilets so that I did not have to pray. Yet, now, Alhamdulillah, I often do a 90-minute round trip driving just to offer Isha in congregation at the Mosque. When I think about this change in me it actually shocks me!"***

Zeeshan continued:

***“Huzoor’s last tour to the US in 2018 was the trigger for this change in me. Though, by then, I had no real interest in religion I decided to skip work in the pizza takeout where I worked and come to the Mosque to welcome Huzoor and to pray behind him. That was the turning point. As soon as I entered the Mosque and saw Huzoor and prayed behind him I felt peace and spirituality. I could not bring myself to leave.”***

Zeeshan continued to attend the Mosque and pray behind Huzoor for the rest of the tour and had witnessed blessings ever since.

Zeeshan said:

***“I got fired from the pizza place because I kept going to the Mosque to pray behind Huzoor! However, somehow, without having the requisite necessary qualifications I soon got a much better job in a bank and now am working in cyber security. I truly believe that it was because my intention was to be near Huzoor and to try to become closer to my faith that I have seen such blessings in my life ever since.”***

I asked Zeeshan how his duty was going at the Mosque on this trip.

In reply, he said:

***“You know sometimes I fear that I will go back to a non-spiritual path and be like I used to. However, Alhamdulillah something always happens to increase my faith before weakness creeps in. Yesterday, I was doing duty and I left my post for a few minutes and went to clean and Hoover an area which I noticed was messy. My intention was to keep it clean in***



*case Huzoor went past and also for the sake of keeping the Mosque complex clean. However, I got reprimanded by some of my supervisors in Hifazat Khas for leaving my post which I thought was a little harsh and unnecessary. I was actually reassigned to another part of the Mosque. I don't know what the reason was but in my mind I was being 'punished'. So, I was pacing back and forth and thinking about all this when suddenly to my complete shock, Huzoor walked right past where I had been reassigned! For ten or fifteen seconds Huzoor looked right at me and smiled directly at me."*

Zeeshan continued:

*"That moment, where perhaps I could have become bitter, instead it has brought me even closer to Allah because it showed me how Allah knows our intentions. He knew my heart was pure and so He arranged for the best of rewards that I got to see Huzoor so closely."*

I really enjoyed spending a few minutes with Zeeshan and would continue to see him throughout the tour doing duty with diligence or when he would line up with other Ahmadis to see Huzoor walk past and he would wave enthusiastically and often Huzoor would wave back at him.

**"Never expect any preferential treatment" – Guiding his family**

During the course of the USA tour, I met quite a number of relatives, including members of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) who resided in the USA or Canada. Quite a few of them were doing duties, such as security, serving or helping in the administrative teams.



On a few occasions, I would sit with some of them, especially those of a similar age to me, and we would discuss various aspects of the tour.

One afternoon, one such relative, mentioned that he often listened to the Friday Sermon Huzoor delivered on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 about my nephew, *Syed Taalay Ahmed shaheed* and he particularly reflected upon the part where Huzoor addressed members of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) and reminded them that they would be judged purely on their deeds and that there was no right of honour or esteem merely from being from the progeny of a noble and revered person.

He mentioned his grief that rather than acting as a means of support and true helper to Khilafat, there were a few members of the Promised Messiah's (as) family who had brought Huzoor pain through their wrongful conduct and materialism.

As he said these words, I could not help but agree and think of moments in the recent past where Huzoor had expressed his displeasure and regret that some members of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) were not giving precedence to their faith.

It is sometimes alleged on social media or in other circles is that the members of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) are given '*special treatment*' within the Jamaat and by Huzoor.

To the contrary, Huzoor's desire and expectation for the family members of the Promised Messiah (as) to be models of humility and morality is something I have seen time and time again.

Throughout his Khilafat he has sought to remind and guide the family members of the Promised Messiah (as) of their obligations to their faith and to be foremost in living up to the expectations of the Promised Messiah (as).

I recall how a few weeks before the USA tour it had come to Huzoor's attention that a member of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) had not been permitted to pray in the Mubarak Mosque in Islamabad due to a lack of space and had been requested to pray outside.

Regarding this, Huzoor spoke to me at length about how no member of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) should ever consider himself or herself to be 'privileged' or to have any special status.

Huzoor said:

***"If there is no space in the Mosque there is no space. Members of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) or senior office bearers should not expect special rules to be applied for them. No person has a right to be treated better than others or to be given favours because of their family link to the Promised Messiah (as) or the Khalifa-Waqt. Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) used to guide his own children about this very point and told them they should never expect any preferential treatment. The other Khulafa will have also told their families the same. Certainly, this is something that I tell my own children and remind them of regularly."***

Huzoor continued:

***“Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) was very open in this regard and would publicly admonish his family and tell Ahmadis that they could refer to his children as ‘Sahibzada’ if they were truly righteous but if their conduct was wrong or immoral then they deserved no respect whatsoever.”***

Huzoor further said:

***“If a sincere Ahmadi, due to his love for the Promised Messiah (as) or the Khalifa-Waqt shows respect to one of the family members of the Promised Messiah (as) themselves that is one thing, but no one should ever expect others to treat them differently to others or even allow themselves to think such a thing.”***

In the same Mulaqat, Huzoor reminded of an incident pertaining to Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) and how he trained the Jamaat members.

Huzoor said:

***“In Qadian, there was a period when there were various security threats against the Jamaat and so Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) instructed that security be increased and he particularly instructed that no person would be allowed to enter the premises of the blessed grave of the Promised Messiah (as) unless they knew the designated security code.”***

Continuing, Huzoor said:

***“One at night, Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) went to the cemetery himself and there was a Khadim on duty. When Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) sought to enter Bahishti Maqbara, the Khadim stopped him and would not let him enter without the code. Upon this Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) asked him if he knew who he was and the Khadim responded, ‘Yes Huzoor, I know who you are and I would gladly sacrifice my life for your sake but without the code I still cannot let you enter’. Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) was extremely pleased with him and said that the Khadim was an example for others.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“I have told you before about how when I was Nazir-e-Ala in Rabwah, a Khadim on duty at the Mosque did a full security check on me and thoroughly patted me down. The Sadr Khuddam Pakistan at the time was very anxious that I was subjected to this check and apologised to me but I did not mind at all. After the check was complete, I went and sat at the back of the Mosque where I preferred to sit.”***

*Alhamdulillah*, today there continues to be many Ahmadis from the family of the Promised Messiah (as) who serve the Jamaat selflessly with great devotion and diligence and despite having close familial relationships with Huzoor, they make sure they abide by the same rules and restrictions that are in place for others.

At this year’s Jalsa Salana UK, the Nazir-e-Ala from Rabwah, Syed Khalid Shah sahib, travelled from Pakistan especially to attend the UK Jalsa. Yet, when he

arrived at Hadeeqatul Mahdi on the first morning of Jalsa, one of his family members tested positive at the gate for Covid. As a result, even though he himself was negative, he returned to his accommodation and he and his family remained in isolation and missed the entire Jalsa.

No special permission was granted because he was the *Nazir-e-Ala* or the brother-in-law of Huzoor.

Similarly, on this USA trip, during the second week, we received word that Amir Sahib USA, Dr Mirza Maghfoor Ahmad sahib, had tested positive for Covid. It was a shock, especially given that Amir Sahib was very diligent in ensuring he wore a face mask at all times.

Yet, as soon as he tested positive, he went into isolation and remained so until he was recovered. He did not seek nor receive any special permission despite being Huzoor's older brother and being the Amir Jamaat.

There will always be some people who seek to cause divides within the Jamaat or claim that the treatment of the family members of the Promised Messiah (as) or senior office bearers is different.

Yet the truth and reality tells a different story.

In terms of the members of the family of the Promised Messiah (as), throughout his Khilafat, Huzoor has repeatedly, both as a Khalifa and as a family elder, sought to ensure that they all fulfil the rights of being members of the Jamaat and are an example for others.

## **Encouraging Ahmadis to Excel – Meeting with AAMS**

Following the group Mulaqats, on the evening of Thursday 29 September, Huzoor held a meeting with members of the *Association of Ahmadi Muslim Scientists (AAMS)* from the United States.

Within a few minutes, it became apparent that Huzoor had developed a very persistent cough and some flu-like symptoms. It was very painful to see Huzoor in distress but, despite the cough, he continued to preside the meeting, as he had the previous two group Mulaqats.



Early in the meeting, Huzoor was informed that the number of Ahmadi men who had attained or were pursuing PhDs exceeded the number of Ahmadi ladies in the United States.

Upon this, Huzoor asked why there was a discrepancy and asked if any Ahmadi men objected to their wives or daughters pursuing the highest level of academic excellence.

Upon this, the *President* of AAMS, Sohail Husain sahib said that efforts were being made by the Association to redress the balance.

Just through his question and comment, Huzoor was making it clear that there should be equality in terms of educational pursuits and encouraged Ahmadi women and girls to seek to attain the highest peaks of educational attainment.

Occasionally, one hears of Ahmadi parents who do not necessarily encourage their daughters to be educated to the same extent as their sons. Similarly, the general media portrayal of Islam in the West continues to be one in which the impression is given that Islam seeks to restrict women and girls in terms of education.

On the other side, the Khalifa-Waqt continues to practice the true teachings of Islam by encouraging and advocating for girls and women to attain the highest possible standards in education and takes pride in their achievements.

Huzoor advised all the scientists to strive to reach the apex of academic excellence and to follow in the footsteps of the late Dr Abdus Salam sahib and asked what progress had been made since he addressed the members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Research Association in 2019 and had concluded his address by praying that *“may we soon come to witness the dawn of a new Islamic golden age led by Ahmadi Muslims”*.

Huzoor said that many young Ahmadi Muslims possessed the potential to excel and so AAMS should ensure that every effort was made to help Ahmadi

Muslims fulfil their potential. Huzoor also encouraged researchers to excel in their fields and to strive to develop innovative solutions to the problems humanity faces so that their research and work may benefit mankind.

### **Never taking a break**

The next morning at Fajr, Huzoor was wearing a warm overcoat and scarf.

During Namaz his cough remained quite persistent and I noticed that he was walking a little slower than normal to and from the Mosque. It did seem as though Huzoor's flu had worsened overnight.

It was very sad to see Huzoor unwell and knowing that he would have no time to rest, as the Mosque was due to be inaugurated later that day with Jumma and a formal reception and meeting was scheduled for Saturday.

When struck by a heavy flu, most of us prefer to retire to our beds, yet Khalifatul Masih affords himself no such luxury.

For example, I found out later that, in an effort to give Huzoor a little time to rest and recover, Amir Sahib USA had asked Huzoor if they should cancel the session of family Mulaqats that were scheduled for Friday evening.

However, Huzoor had responded that the Mulaqats should not be cancelled as he did not want for any of the Ahmadi families to be disappointed.



## **Inauguration of Fath-e-Azeem Mosque**

A few hours later, Alhamdulillah, on 30 September 2022, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) delivered an historic Friday Sermon to officially inaugurate the Fath-e-Azeem Mosque in Zion, Illinois.



As he spoke about the victory of the Promised Messiah (as) over Alexander Dowie, Huzoor said that the opening of the Mosque was not just a day of happiness and joy but ought to be a day of immense gratitude of Ahmadi Muslims to Allah the Almighty that He enabled such a great sign of the truth of the Promised Messiah (as) to be observed by the whole world.

Most compellingly and emotionally, Huzoor said that the greatest '*Fath-e-Azeem*' was of the Holy Prophet (sa) at the time of the Victory of Makkah. Huzoor said that after that victory, the Muslims did not rest or consider their duties fulfilled, rather their passion and efforts to spread the true teachings of Islam continued to increase. In the same way, Huzoor said that the opening

of the Mosque in Zion should not be a moment to pause or rest, rather it ought to be a moment to inspire Ahmadis around the world to increase their efforts to practice and preach the teachings of Islam.



Huzoor reminded the members of the Jamaat that the Promised Messiah (as) did not come to convey his message to any single town or city, rather he was sent by Allah to spread Islam's teachings to every nation and every corner of the world.

As he concluded his address, Huzoor said that each Ahmadi Muslim should strive to bring about a spiritual revolution within themselves and to strive to morally better themselves and their children. Otherwise, mere knowledge of the pathetic and humiliating end of Dowie and the many other great victories of the Promised Messiah (as) would not benefit us.

Huzoor said:

***"Indeed, this was a victory and a testament to the truthfulness of the Promised Messiah (as). However, as I have mentioned, the mission of the Promised Messiah (as) is very vast and this is just the mention of a victory on one front. We will find true happiness and joy only when we bring the entire world into the blessed fold of the Holy Prophet (sa). To achieve this, we must seek out new avenues of propagating Islam. We must present the arguments of the Messiah of Muhammad (sa) to the world. More so than ever, we must improve our actions and spiritual states."***



As Huzoor returned to his residence after leading the Friday Prayers, the Mosque complex in Zion was abuzz with excitement and joy amongst Ahmadis who had travelled far and wide to attend and be part of that historic occasion.

Certainly, after listening to Huzoor's address, every person seemed to better appreciate and understand the great sign of the truth of the Promised

Messiah (as) regarding the challenge with Dowie and to understand their own responsibilities.

### **“A mini-Islamabad” in Zion**

One person, who felt particularly overjoyed and emotional was the *National Sadr Lajna USA*, Dhiya Tahira Bakr sahiba, an African American convert to Islam, who lived with her family in Zion itself.

Furthermore, the members of Lajna Imaillah USA had the honour of being the largest financial contributors to the Zion Mosque project, having raised \$1.7million dollars.

Following the Mosque opening, I asked Sadr Sahiba about her own journey to Islam, her reflections on the opening of the Mosque and her experiences of Huzoor’s tour.

In response, Dhiya Bakr sahiba said:

***“As far as I am aware, I am the only Muslim in my family. It so happened that Ahmadiyyat entered my life in college when a Lajna member, Nycemah Yaqub sahiba gave me lots of books to read and I met the Jamaat members of Chicago Illinois who were very friendly. The turning point though was when I travelled to Ghana in 1984 and saw Ahmadiyyat there and how our Ahmadis practiced true Islam. I also was able to meet with Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) on that occasion, before he was Khalifa, but I’m not sure if he remembers me. Anyway, the trip to Ghana was a culmination of my journey to Islam and where I took Bai’at.”***

Dhiya sahiba told me she didn't initially know that much about the history of the Promised Messiah's (as) prayer duel with Alexander Dowie, until the USA Jamaat held a large Tabligh conference in the Year 2000 in Wisconsin, hosted by the Zion Jamaat.

Dhiya Bakr sahiba said:

***“The Messiah 2000 event held in Wisconsin was electrifying for Jamaat members and non-Muslims alike. Later, our National Amir at the time, Respected M. M. Ahmad sahib said that we should try to make Zion the first ‘Ahmadi city’ in the United States and it was then that my husband and I initiated our move to Zion.”***

With regard to the Fath-e-Azeem Mosque and the major contribution of Lajna Imaillah USA towards it, Dhiya sahiba said:

***“Those of us who lived in Zion really wanted a beautiful Mosque that was inviting to the public and that was a beacon of light and hope for others and a place of refuge... Our Lajna members in the USA are very compassionate to the mission of the Promised Messiah (as) and helping in any way they can. I think that when the opportunity to contribute monetarily to build a Mosque in the USA like Lajna members did in Berlin, Germany and being reminded of the sacrifices of our pioneer sisters, who gave despite their little money, it touched the hearts of the Lajna. They wanted to live up to the example of the prior Lajna members.”***



Reflecting on Huzoor's presence, Dhiya sahiba said:

***“Huzoor’s presence has been exhilarating but also exhausting! To follow our beloved Huzoor requires a lot of stamina! He has strong will and resolve but for me, trying to keep up, it was like trying to climb a mountain!... In truth, Huzoor’s presence here and him personally inaugurating this Mosque is like a miracle and a special blessing. I keep thinking that for this period this Mosque is like a ‘mini-Islamabad’ from the UK. Also, I keep thinking of how the Promised Messiah (as) tried to reason with Dowie to stop ridiculing the Holy Prophet (sa). Now, in the year 2022, his physical and spiritual progeny in the person of Khalifatul Masih V is in Zion to promote peace and religious freedom. And the successor of the Promised Messiah (as) is to be presented with the Key to the City of Zion. Alhamduillah!”***

Dhiya sahiba continued:

***“As a convert, there are still many things I am learning and, on this visit, I have learned better what is meant when we say that the Khalifa is our ‘beloved’. I felt and saw his kindness and love for the members of the Jamaat and to me personally so much that he truly took on the persona of a beloved. Huzoor is my mentor and role model. When I feel weak, I think of our beloved Huzoor and how he works and interacts with Ahmadis and others. How he responds to my letters gives me strength and resolve.”***

Finally, after having listened to the Friday Sermon, Dhiya sahiba understood that there was still a great deal of work to be done. She said:

*“One evening (after the Mosque opening), my husband and I walked together and he said to me that ‘Our job is now done’. I replied ‘Nope! Now we have to make Zion an Ahmadi city!’ Certainly, as I sit in this Fath-e-Azeem Mosque, I feel the immediate need to focus our efforts on Tabligh and service to mankind because I feel the community of Zion is waiting to see what comes next.”*

What came next in terms of Huzoor’s tour were many more special moments in which Huzoor conveyed the teachings of Islam and continued to show love and affection to the members of the Jamaat as his journey continued.

### **End of Part 1**

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