

Friday Sermon: Jalsa Salana UK 2014 and Hospitality

22 August 2014

With the grace of God UK Jalsa Salana begins next Friday. Quite a lot of preparation has taken place at the Jalsa Gah or the site where Jalsa will be held, Hadiqatul Mahdi, and guests have also started arriving. May God protect all those travelling to Jalsa to seek its blessings and make their journey easy and bring them safely! With the worsening global situation one is concerned for travellers. Our prayer is that not just Ahmadis but every person in the world is in peace and may they attain the relief for which the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) was sent in this age.

Our Jalsa arrangements are carried out on voluntary basis and with reference to this a week prior to Jalsa Hazrat Khalifatul Masih draws attention to relevant matters as indeed he did today. Hospitality matters are not only relevant for Jalsa volunteers but also for every person who is accommodating Jalsa guests in his home. In fact a true believer should respect and regard guests in normal situations as well, but today the focus will be on Jalsa hospitality.

Jalsa guests come purely for religious reasons as indeed attendance of Jalsa should be only for religious purposes. Due to this the significance of these guests is that much greater especially because the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) has drawn our attention to the fact that Jalsa Salana is purely for religious purposes. People do not come to Jalsa for personal interests or for worldly delights and if anyone does so, they negate their spiritual reward. Jalsa guests are of course those who gather for the sake of God and in affirmation of a system that the Imam of the age established. Particularly so those who come to the UK Jalsa do so with specific focus and at times by spending more than they can afford so that they may attain its blessings. Love of Khilafat motivates them about meeting the Khalifa of the time. When Huzoor observes love of Khilafat in the eyes of Jalsa guests, new Ahmadis as well as long-term Ahmadis, from different countries, he thanks God because their love is owing to God's grace and is not something that can be possibly generated through human efforts.

This is merely by virtue of the advent of the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) whom God sent to establish a way once again to disseminate the true teaching of Islam to the world and the message of love and peace to be taken to the world and the world be told that peace of the world lies in true Islam alone. Nowadays many countries are also represented in the German Jalsa Salana in a large number so that they may meet the Khalifa of the time. A large majority of people come to the UK Jalsa specifically to benefit from the spiritual atmosphere of Jalsa and to be recipients of the prayers of the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) and also meet the Khalifa of the time. This fervour cannot be found in any worldly relation and conditions of Bai'at draw attention to this matter!

The guests coming to UK Jalsa have a special station and significance and by virtue of this the significance of those serving them is also enhanced. Members of the Jama'at offer their services appreciating this significance. High ranking people in worldly terms and high earners are given the task of cooking large pots of food, make bread and other various jobs, even cleaning of toilets which they do happily because this service makes them the recipients of prayers. Their service also becomes a source of Tabligh for people outside the Jama'at. Even children who serve drinking water to guests are a source of silent Tabligh. Their service tells the world that we are not those who create disorder; we facilitate physical as well as spiritual water to the world. Fortunate are those who offer their services on a voluntary basis to serve guests at Jalsa Salana and thus seek God's pleasure.

The Holy Qur'an states special significance of hospitality. It mentions the hospitality of Hazrat Ibrahim (on whom be peace) where it mentions his station and qualities. Hosts who selflessly serve their guests and do so promptly upon receiving their guests are appreciated by God because they understand that by serving guests they will seek God's pleasure. They do not have any designs of receiving gratitude or anything else. There is no

other example in the world of guests who travel solely for the sake of God and hosts who receive them solely for the sake of God other than at Jalsa. In fact they start preparations many days prior to the arrival of guests to make farmland logistically habitable and operable. They do so because they have accepted the Imam of the age in accordance with the saying of God and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and they are united under the auspices of Khilafat and try to fulfil their pledge!

Experience of every year tells us that every young and old, man and woman volunteer serves at Jalsa Salana with a special fervour. The reports of Waqar e Aml this year tell us that young people are joining in this year through Waqfe Arzi who have not had any previous experience. Huzoor said he always says about those who associate themselves with the Jama'at and call themselves Ahmadi that if there is any inattentiveness on their part towards any task of the Jama'at it is because those responsible to get things done are not doing their work properly. It is not possible for someone who calls himself an Ahmadi not to turn up when he is explained the need and asked to come and help. Proper guidance is our task and this is why God enjoins reminding so that proper guidance is given. Indeed, change comes about with proper guidance done in an appropriate manner along with advice. Guidance is not only needed by those who are weak and do not pay attention but is also important for the newcomers. They should be explained the facts about the spirit of serving although a large majority of newcomers emulate good models of practice and offer their services. Similarly, attention of children needs to be drawn when they first get involved. There is also a need to advice young newcomers regarding the significance of serving. This is why it is commanded: 'And keep on exhorting; for verily, exhortation benefits those who would believe.' (51:56). This reminding should not be considered as unnecessary repetition. Many forget matters which require attention in spite of previous reminders and further reminding helps them and some acknowledge that reminding is helpful.

It should be remembered that there are many among the Jalsa guests who come from far off places and serving travellers is the way and obligation of true believers. A sixth of the guests at UK Jalsa Salana come from other countries, including the Far East, Pakistan, India, America, Africa, South America etc. and half of them come from other cities of the UK. They too are guests and travellers. In fact for some infirm elderly people even travel from London to Hadiqatul Mahdi is an arduous journey. Every duty-holder worker, man and woman, is aware that these are our guests and we have to serve them and be courteous to them in every way. At times some guests are unfair but we must always do our duty with steadfastness.

God informs us in the Holy Qur'an by giving the example of a Prophet, how to serve guests. The greeting of a guest should be responded to with a warmer and heartier greeting and good wishes should be conveyed to him and he should be made to feel safe and secure and delight should be expressed to him. Our guests are not only Ahmadis; others require greater attention. They observe how Ahmadis serve at Jalsa overall and not just how they are treated. It should always be kept in view that we have to serve the guests in a way that would be a source of delight to them in the real sense, just as we would serve our own relatives. If we serve them with the same delight as we would our own family, then alone will we be paying the dues of serving them! Anyone can serve their own family and even put up with airs and graces of those who are very dear to them. Real fervour to serve can be gauged when one serves those in similar way with whom one has no blood ties. Jalsa guests should be made to feel safe and secure as much as possible and all resources and conditions should be put to use to offer them the best possible hospitality. The management should always be thinking on these lines.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) who understood and practised Divine commandments more than anyone else has guided us that we have obligation to serve our guests. We note many examples from his blessed life where he would receive many guests, so he would distribute the guests among his Companions and also take the responsibility to serve some himself. A tradition relates that when some guest arrived upon asking Hazrat 'Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) informed him that there was only enough food and drink at home for him. He tasted the food a little and then offered it to the guests. Certainly he only tasted the food so that it was be blessed and thus his guests were satiated by the meagre amount of food. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) also trained his Companions to selflessly serve guests.

Anyone without problems, living in comfort and with helpers can serve guests; real hospitality is that which is undertaken by putting oneself through difficulty. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) established the rights of guests and enjoined true believers to abide by them. It was due to his spiritual and moral training of his Companions that they too followed his blessed model and left models of hospitality that pleased God and God informed the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) there and then of His pleasure.

According to Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him), a traveller came to the Prophet and the latter asked his family for something to give him to eat. The family replied they had nothing except water at home. The Prophet asked his Companions who would look after the traveller. A Companion said he would. Then he led this man to his home and asked his wife to serve the guest of the Messenger of God. She replied, 'We have nothing except our children's supper.' 'Oh, well,' he replied, 'get the meal ready, light the lamp, and put the child to bed on some pretext.' So the woman prepared the meal, lit the lamp, put the children to bed, then, getting up as if to trim the lamp, she extinguished it. The Companion and his wife then made as if to eat, but in fact they spent the night with empty stomachs. The next day when the Companion went to find the Messenger of God, who smiled and told him that God had liked his planning of the previous night. Traditions relate that this is when the following verse was revealed: '...but prefer others to themselves even though poverty be their own lot. And whoso is rid of the covetousness of his own soul – it is these who will be successful.' (59:10) The Companion and his wife did this to serve a guest as serving guests is a commandment, moreover, this was a guest of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and it was that much more important to offer him good hospitality.

This model should be kept in view even today as regards the guests of Jalsa who are the guests of the true and ardent devotee of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and who travel for religious purpose. In this regard although the motive is the same today the situation is different. When Jalsa management calls on the workers they are not asked to take guests to their homes to serve. We do not have the conditions faced by the Companions who had nothing in their homes and their children went hungry. Today all we have to do is offer our services and fortunate are those men, women and children who are appointed tasks to perform without any real arduousness. When Jalsa Salana was held in Rabwah, people of Rabwah used to sacrifice their own home comforts for the guests and although the Langar operated for several hours, inhabitants of Rabwah took it upon themselves to cater for their guests. Anyhow, the conditions faced by the Companions have not existed for anyone else.

We see examples in the life of the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) where in compliance with his master he also sacrificed his comfort for hospitality of others and spent winter nights without any warm bedding, used Hazrat Amaan Jaan's (may Allah be pleased with her) jewellery to obtain cash for food for guests. This spirit of sacrifice can also be seen among his companions. Sahibzada Pir Sirajul Haq Sahib relates that the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) had given him a bedstead for personal use. When visitors came they would sleep on his bedstead and he would lie on the floor on his Prayer mat. At times his bedstead would have bedding on it and guests would go ahead and rest on it. He did not ever feel negative about it because he realised the visitors were guests while he was local to Qadian. At times some guests would throw his bedding on the floor, put their own bedding on his bedstead to sleep on. This is what happened once and someone informed the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) that Pir Sahib was sleeping on the floor. The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) promptly came out and asked Pir Sahib why did he sleep on the floor, it was the rainy season and there was a danger of snakes and scorpions. Pir Sahib explained the matter to him and said that he did not say anything to the guests as they needed to be looked after. The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) sent another bedstead for Pir Sahib which stayed with him for a few days before some other guest took it. Again, someone informed the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) and again, he sent yet another bedstead. This bedstead was also taken and the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) was again informed. He said to Pir Sahib: 'Sahibzada Sahib, what you do is right; this is what our friends should do. Still, do one thing, put a chain on the bedstead and hang it on the ceiling.' Hearing this Maulawi Abdul Karim Sahib laughed and said that

some guests are so clever they would even take the bedstead down from the ceiling! The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) also laughed at this.

Huzoor said thus at times we also encounter 'latifa' (joke, humour, epigram) during the course of hospitality. Huzoor said sometimes he uses the [Urdu] word latifa when relating something humorous. In Urdu the word 'latifa' signifies something good, a deep, meaningful point and also something humorous. Once Huzoor was listening to the sermon translation and noted that, although the point Huzoor had made was humorous, but it had been made to convey something deep and a profound point was made; sometimes mistakes are made in translation. Like here, the point being conveyed is that one should look after one's things.

Another incident is related by Sheikh Yaqub Ali Arfani Sahib. He said that many guests had gathered during the event of 'Jang e Muqqadas' [a book of the Promised Messiah] and one day it was overlooked to serve food to the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace). Arfani Sahib had advised his wife about this but due to being involved in a lot of work, she forgot. A large part of the evening had passed and after a lot of waiting the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) asked about food. Everyone was worried as it was late and shops had closed and there was no food available. When the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) was notified of the situation he said there was no need to be so perturbed and bothered. He simply asked to look into the dastarkhwan (cloth in which bread is kept or cloth on which food is served) to see what was left over. A few pieces of bread were found in the dastarkhwan, the Promised Messiah said they were sufficient and simple had one or two pieces. Therein is a lesson for our workers not to be perturbed if sometimes there is any shortage of food and should sacrifice for the sake of guests. Arfani Sahib relates that this incident may appear ordinary but it makes evident the amazingly simple and informal nature of the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace). Arrangements for food could have been made from scratch at the time and everyone would have been delighted to do this but the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) did not wish to inconvenience anyone at the late hour and did not care that proper food was not served to him. He did not question anyone on their negligence and carelessness and did not show any disapproval. In fact most pleasantly and warmly he removed their worry!

With the grace of God large majority of our workers are very courteous, but some people still complain. However, it is the responsibility of the officer of each department, especially the department of food and hospitality to arrange food for their workers so that they can eat after their duty.

The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) advised us as follows, which Jalsa workers should always keep in mind.

'I am always mindful that no guest should be inconvenienced. In fact I always advise that as far as possible guests should be made comfortable. A guest's heart is delicate like glass and is broken at the slightest of knocks. Earlier I had made arrangements to eat with the guests. However with the progression of my ailment I had to take dietary precautions, so the arrangement did not remain. Besides, the number of guests increased so much that there was not enough space. Therefore, out of necessity I had to eat separately. I permit everyone that they may present their dietary requirements. Separate food arrangements can be made for those who are not well.'

It should be borne in mind that sentiments of any guest should never be hurt and courtesy should be shown at every instance. If someone has a complaint they should not be dealt with indifferently, rather their problem should be alleviated. In conclusion Huzoor said that with the grace of God workers of every Jalsa department are now well-trained and understand their work very well and have the discernment to do the task. However, at times over confidence weakens the system. While confidence should be maintained, it should not cause to overlook and neglect minor details of the task in hand. Secondly, the security department especially needs to be active. Just as the Jama'at progresses and courageously refutes everything wrong practiced by many extremists who bring Islam into disrepute, our opposition also increases as does envy against us and efforts to hatch plans against us. Therefore, this department needs to be active from now onwards. They should not start appraising

the situation on the day. Rather, regular meetings should be taking place. It should also be kept in mind that with all the deep scrutiny of the security department there should not be any slackening in courtesy. Duty-holders on all the points where checks are made should be courteous and each point should not have just youngsters on duty and should also have mature people present. All duty-holders should pray for their tasks to be accomplished in an excellent manner. All our tasks are accomplished through God's help and not through anyone's competence or efforts. And prayer is very important to garner God's grace. Everyone else too should pray that may God enable all arrangements of Jalsa to be completed on time and may all the facilities be available for the guests!