

June 1, 2008

Three days after returning from Canada, my mind is still replaying portions of the Convocation, the journey, the people... In my head, I hear their voices, and talk to them, in my mind's eye, I see them before me. My heart, I know, will cherish the experience for a long time.

The Journey

Many online students, like me, had driven up to Canada to attend the Convocation. The US states that were represented included Arizona, New York, New Jersey, Texas, Florida, Michigan, Maryland and Georgia.

The group that impressed me most was the one from Georgia. I think they had the longest drive at 17 hours. They were the only ones who had traveled together as a group and appointed an '*amir*'. I immediately thought of the many expeditions that our Prophet (saw) sent, always under the leadership of a competent *sahabi*. Their journey was a clear instance of '*Ittabe e Sunnah*' – putting knowledge to action.

There were many others who had come from even farther off...Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK and Australia. Some had braved many odds and opposition. Some had brought along their babies and families; others had left them behind. Some women were ill (I know of at least one cancer patient who had traveled many miles), some were frail and old; some had left behind ailing family members. Like Hazrat Abu Bakr on the occasion of the Tabuk Expedition, one said confidently: '*Allah key saharay chore kur aai hoon*' (Allah is a Sufficient Caretaker).

It would be impossible to relate the personal anecdotes of all, but almost everybody had a story to tell. Their eyes shone and there was determination in their bearing, and they were all joined together by the Love for Allah. Some would call it '*dewangi*' (craziness) but only the '*Qasideen*' of this '*Minhaaj*' would understand WHY we had come.

Looking at the light in their eyes and the special glow on their faces, one had to admit: *it is only love FOR Allah that can join hearts thus.*

Friday, June 27

We reached the Al Huda Center in Canada on Friday and were greeted by a busy bustle of women. Names on the attendance roll-call in the PalTalk room became people as "Online" sisters met each other. There were tears of joy and warm hugs. There were screeches of recognition and squeals of laughter. ***We had arrived home.***

Lunch had been arranged, and in an informal meeting, students sat with their dear Ustaza, exchanging introductions and personal feelings.

Somebody commented that the whole week Ustaza had been going home late at night, personally overseeing each and every detail. We witnessed some of this as she listened to students rehearsing speeches, and saw Sir Idrees making seating arrangements. There was activity all around and volunteers bustling everywhere. There were young girls making banners, in-charges printing lists and setting up certificate distribution booths, the host team getting duty instructions. Shazia Baji (the Online In-charge) was there till 3 am on the eve of the Ceremony, putting last minute touches.

Had I not had the opportunity to be there on Friday, I would probably have missed out the 'essence' of the Convocation.

The Convocation Ceremony

As is the custom at Al Huda, people were classified by "colors" on the Big Day: the Online students wore peach scarves, the center students blue, the teachers off white, the regular students white, and so on.

After a few opening words by Ustaza, Asma (her second daughter) came to the podium for Recitation of the Quran. I wondered which Surah she would choose. She began Surah Ad Dahr. But of course! Wasn't it the one the Prophet (saw) recited on Eid and occasions of large gatherings? She had to stop more than once as emotions choked her.

She read of the gifts Allah has prepared in heaven:

وَجَزَاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا

"And their recompense shall be Paradise, and silken garments,
because they were patient".

إِنَّ هَذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَاءً وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُورًا

"(And it will be said to them):

"Verily, this is a reward for you, and your endeavor has been accepted."

(سورة الإنسان, Chapter 76, Ayahs 18 & 22)

I feel sure that in that moment, those who understood the meaning of those words, gave thanks to Allah for the *ilm* He had bestowed, and prayed with Asma for those bounties. There was not a dry eye in the house.

We kept on wiping tears as we heard Mubin Aunty's account of Al Huda's creation in Canada (in the voice of Rushda), the reflections of some students and their daughters, the poem recited together by Asma and Hisham, the chirpy voice of Shazia Baji.

At different points, Ustazah read 2 chapters (titled '*Ulema e Soe and Ulema e Huqq*'; and '*Dil ke Kaifeya*at') from the Book "Minhajul Qasideen" by Ibn Al Jawzi. (The book had been given as gifts to all graduates).

After being an online student for so many months, it was difficult to pull myself to the reality of a 'live' setting. Although the students sat in rapt attention, I was constantly distracted as my senses responded to stimuli from all around. I realized that I had become so used to the computer screen, my study table and chair, the environs of my own home, that it was difficult to juxtapose myself to the real class.

Usually when Ustaza asks a question, I reply promptly to the screen. But now when she posed a question, I looked up blankly. All I remember from that session is the topic of the chapter we read.

Student Reflections

Ustaza has taught us that no gathering should be devoid of learning and personal growth. So here are the comments of some of the students who were present at the occasion:

"I learnt concern for one's own time and others' time. If you have pledged 3 minutes, then do not exceed by even half a minute. Do not waste any time in idleness (e.g. while eating)".

"I learnt from Ustaza's style keh jame baat kurein: use few words but effectively."

"I saw that Ustaza was always available, and not isolated from others".

"I was most impressed by the involvement of her family, especially her son. To get teenagers to participate is often the toughest challenge....It was the same target that had been given to us: ghar walon ko sath ley kur chalein.."

"There were so many young volunteers around. Motivating them and involving everybody was awesome".

"Stick together and work as a group. I learnt Planning, Organization and Team Management".

"As we studied in 'Minhaj ul Qasideen' the company of good people (suhbat e salih) inspires you to do more as you realize your own shortcomings and how much more still needs to be done".

"Ustaza left the stage when the chief guest came to the mike. I saw total humility in that little gesture".

Last words

As Ustaza referred to us as 'ahl e ilm', she placed the burden of responsibility squarely on our shoulders. It was no small favor of Allah that we had been 'chosen', *Alhamdulillah*. But it was up to us now to take the torch forth. No effort is too small or worthless, as we struggle to accomplish the work of *anbiya*.

The Convocation energized and motivated me. It made me realize anew the importance of the path I had chosen to tread. And the road that still lay ahead.

Was this Convocation about the little piece of paper we got? Or was it just an excuse to get together people sharing the same purpose of life?

To quote Ustaza herself:

“Allah ney dunya mein tu hamein jama kur diya heh, akhirat mein bhi Allah kurey hum sub issi tarha arsh ke saye taley jama hoon”.

Ameen. Summa Ameen.

It was an honor to be part of that *ijtima* that memorable day.