

My First Ever Visit to Australia

The Land of Koalas and Great Coffee!
(August 2023)

Muhammad Ibn Adam
Al-Kawthari



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Preliminary

By the Grace of Allah Most High, I recently returned from an eight-day visit of Australia. This was my first ever – and long overdue – visit to this beautiful country, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience, Al-Ḥamdulillāh. I have travelled to many countries during the past two decades, often repeatedly, but never visited Australia. As such, when the opportunity arose, I embraced it wholeheartedly, despite a very busy schedule. Ideally, a visit to such a faraway and large country requires a minimum of two weeks, but my schedule (and other responsibilities such as looking after my old and frail father) did not allow me to take out more than nine/ten days for this trip. I had initially requested those who were inviting me to postpone the trip to December 2023, but then, upon reflection, felt it was not appropriate to delay it further and decided to travel.

I was primarily invited by the Zuhd Academy of Melbourne (Victoria). However, the main instigator was my dear friend, Shaykh Mawlana Mu'im Siddiqui of Melbourne. Shaykh Mu'im initially studied the *dars nizāmi/ālimiyya* curriculum for six years locally, at the Dār al-'Ulūm seminary in the Fawkner area of Melbourne. He then travelled to the world-famous and prestigious seat of Islamic learning, Jāmi'ah Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi (Pakistan), and studied under major scholars such as Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). He graduated from there in 2015. Currently, he is an imam at a *musalla* in the Melton area

of Melbourne and a teacher of Islamic sciences and Arabic at Al-Imān College. He has also translated some Urdu works of our dear late teacher, Shaykh Mufti Muhmud Ashraf Usmani (d. 2021, may Allah have mercy on him), and enjoyed a somewhat good relationship with him. He also remains in contact with Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, and visits him in Karachi when possible. It was during one such visit to Karachi (last year, during Ramadan 1443/April 2022) that we met, and he suggested the idea of having me visit Australia. Since then we remained in contact. He appears to be a very pleasant, balanced, well-mannered and humble individual, *ma shā Allah*. His help and support in organizing the visit, and company during it, is much appreciated. May Allah reward him abundantly and bless him and his family. *Āmīn*.

Shaykh Mu'im contacted his brother-in-law, who is the head of Zuhd Academy, Shaykh Dr Sāmi al-Hashmi, and together they arranged my visit and tour schedule. Dr Sāmi is a qualified dental surgeon and also completed a Degree in Islamic studies from the World Islamic Sciences & Education University in Jordan. He also studied privately with various traditional Islamic scholars in Jordan, and enjoys a close connection with Shaykh Nuh Keller of Jordan. He served as an imam across New Zealand and Australia, and currently serves as an imam in Point Cook, Melbourne, as well as running after-school classes for Muslim children – in addition to his practice of dentistry. It was my first time meeting him. I found him to be a person of good manners, discipline, hard work and balance. His help and support, too, in organizing the visit is much appreciated. May Allah reward him abundantly and bless him and his family. *Āmīn*.

The duration of my tour was limited to eight/nine days, but amounted to ten days including travel time (7-17 August, 2023). Due to the shortage of time, it was decided that I visit three cities: Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra. Dr Sāmi and Shaykh Mu'im contacted the various mosques and Islamic organisations in these cities and arranged my various lectures. Unfortunately, it was not possible to visit Brisbane, Perth and other cities due to time constraints, despite wanting to do so and some of the locals almost complaining why a visit to their city was not arranged. If Allah permits, a visit to these cities can be arranged in the future.

Australia

Before recounting the details of the trip, it may be appropriate to provide a brief overview of Australia and Muslims residing in this part of the world. Australia – officially known as the Commonwealth of Australia, and informally referred to as Down Under – is a sovereign country comprising the mainland of the Australian continent, the island of Tasmania, and numerous smaller islands. It lies in between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and is the only country in the world that covers an entire continent (being the smallest continent). It is also the world's largest island and the sixth-largest country, spanning over 2.969 million square miles. Although it is rich in natural resources and possesses a lot of fertile land, more than one-third of Australia is desert. The country is divided into six states and two territories. The six states are as follows: New South Wales (NSW), the capital of which is Sydney; Victoria (VIC), the capital of which is Melbourne; Queensland (QLD), the capital of which is Brisbane; South Australia (SA), the capital of which is Adelaide; Western Australia (WA), the capital of which is Perth; and Tasmania Island (TAS) located on the southern end, the capital of which is Hobart. At the top end of Australia lies the Northern Territory (NT), home to the capital city, Darwin; whilst the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is home to Canberra, which is the capital city of Australia as a whole.

My respected and beloved teacher, Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him), visited Australia in 2000 and penned a detailed travelogue describing his trip, published in his Urdu book entitled: *Dunya Mere Aāghe* (The World before Me). The following is a summary of what he wrote whilst introducing Australia:

“Geologists state that looking at its rock structure, Australia is the oldest continent, but the last to be discovered. It is generally said that Great Britain’s Navy Captain, James Cook, was the first to discover Australia in 1770, but this is only true insofar as modern civilisation is concerned in that he was the first sailor to reach the Australian shores. However, there are many others who reached Australia before him. When the British arrived in Australia, they found people who had already been residing there for centuries – known as the Aborigines – and they numbered no less than 300,000. Based on their physical features, and other historical evidence, it appears that they moved here from Indonesia and South Asia. The Aborigines initially welcomed the British, but when the British began annihilating them – as per their preconceived plan – they resisted and fought back. Thousands were killed mercilessly by the British, and eventually the locals had no option but to surrender to the British and accept their plan. Despite thousands being killed, a good number of them still reside in Australia today. They generally live in villages and small towns, and are mostly uneducated. Alcohol is sold very cheaply in their regions and, hence, they drink excessively and are satisfied with their current state.

Australia is blessed with vast natural resources. It possesses mines of practically every mineral such as gold,

petrol and uranium. As a result, cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Canberra rival the USA and Europe in their magnificence and development. However, many people are unaware that Muslims – from in and around Pakistan (Asia), from Karachi to Khyber – played a significant role in the acquisition of such natural resources.

To elaborate: when the British initially settled in Australia, they realized that to link the various regions of this large continent, and discover the rich mineral wealth in the central regions, roads needed to be built. The problem, however, was that the central regions were nearly all desert, and the British had no experience in dealing with such terrains. They tried operating whilst riding horses, but to no avail. They concluded that only camels would be of benefit, but camels were non-existent in Australia. Thus, they purchased them from various places and had them transported via ships. The British had little or no experience in handling camels. Many camels died on route, before reaching the Australian coast, and those that did survive were afflicted with various ailments and eventually died. Thus, they recognised that in order to properly benefit from the camels, expert camel-handlers would also need to be brought in. A group of Australian (formerly British) traders reached the shores of Karachi and struck deals with camel-handlers of Sind, Makran, Baluchistan and the district of Sarhad. Consequently, many camel owners travelled, with their camels, to Australia in order to assist the locals working in the tough desert terrains. These camel-handlers were strong, hardworking and experts in the desert terrains. In return for basic remuneration, they fulfilled tasks which appeared impossible for many years. It is due to their efforts and hard

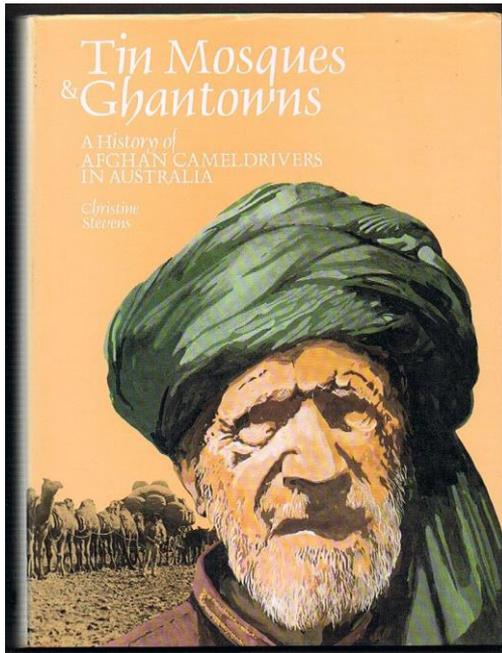
work that roads and pathways were erected in the Australian deserts, mines were discovered, and heavy loads of minerals were carried. Australia began benefiting from its vast natural resources until eventually the entire country stood on its feet.

Although these camel-handlers arrived from Sindh, Makran, Baluchistan and Sarhad, many of them originated from Afghanistan. As such, they are referred to as “Afghans” by the locals, and later shortened to “Ghans.” They were Muslims and established their own villages, referred to in Australia as “Ghantowns.” The very first group of these camel-handlers set off from Karachi seaport, and arrived in Australia on 31st December, 1865. It consisted of 125 camels and some other animals, and 31 Afghani camel-handlers. They were strong and committed Muslims and, despite the trying and testing conditions they were forced to undergo at the hands of the Australian officers, succeeded in establishing thatched roof mosques. Gradually, further mosques were built with tin roofs, earning them the name “Tin Mosques.” The very first mosque to be built within a city region was close to Adelaide in 1890 and the second mosque was then built in Perth in 1905.

Despite the fact that these Afghani camel-handlers played a significant role in Australia’s development, the British settlers did not treat them well from the beginning. In 1920, when roads were constructed and mines discovered, the need for camels ended. The Afghanis were denied permission to remain in Australia and, therefore, many returned home. Those who stayed behind were forced to undergo hardships and difficulties. Sadly, their contribution in Australia’s history is now almost overlooked and ignored. However, an Australian researcher, Christine Stevens, authored a book in

1989 entitled: [Tin Mosques and Ghantowns: History of Afghan Camel-drivers in Australia](#). In approximately 372 pages, he examines in detail the history of these camel-handlers and their early struggles. After these Afghans, many Muslims from Albania, Turkey, Lebanon, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh came over and settled in Australia.” (Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *The World before Me*, p 180-184)

According to a government census in 1991, Muslims from 67 different countries were residing in Australia, with the Muslim population put at 147,507. In 2000, the total population of Australia was 20 million, and non-official estimates put the Muslims at around 500,000 (*The World before Me*, p184). According to the 2021 census, Islam has grown and the combined number of people who self-identified as Muslims in Australia, from all forms of Islam, constituted 813,392 people, which is 3.2% of the total Australian population. (See: The Australian Bureau of Statistics). The majority of Muslims reside in New South Wales, followed by Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia. As stated previously, I visited three cities: Sydney (in New South Wales), Melbourne (in Victoria), and Canberra (in the Australian Capital Territory).



Departure

I had a busy start to the weekend of August 3 and 4, 2023. Two events were organised in the UK by the US based Miftāh Institute, entitled: “Anchored by the Qur’an” – in Manchester on Saturday and London on Sunday. Along with other speakers, I was invited to speak at both events. Accordingly, I travelled to Manchester on Saturday and had planned to attend the Sunday London event as well, scheduled to start at 5 pm. The idea was to attend the event/conference, speak first, and then head to the airport for the night-time flight. However, a few days prior, the organisers informed me that the London event had been delayed and would not commence until at least after 6:30 pm. I was in two minds about attending. Eventually, I decided not to take the risk and unfortunately missed the London event.

As such, I began my long journey to Australia on Sunday 3rd August, 2023, at 10 pm from London Heathrow Airport. I had never undertaken such a long flight before and, therefore, was mentally preparing myself for it since a few days. Long-haul flights can be uncomfortable and exhausting, especially for those who are unable to sleep on aeroplanes. However, my journey was relatively smooth and comfortable, *Al-Hamdulillāh*. I departed on Etihad Airways for Abu Dhabi and, after a seven-hour flight, landed in the UAE Capital at 8 am local time. After a stopover of about two hours, giving me the opportunity to stretch my legs and walk a bit, I departed Abu Dhabi International Airport at 10 am (now Monday 7th

August) on a thirteen-hour long flight to Melbourne. I occupied myself with some reading, writing and, availing of the on-board WiFi service, responding to some WhatsApp messages and emails. I normally find it difficult to sleep during flights, and it was the same this time around. I probably managed to get two-hours sleep. As I looked out of the window, at one point, I saw the beautiful scene of the sun setting behind an array of fluffy, scattered clouds. The following verse came to mind: *“Did you not see that Allah makes the night enter into the day, and makes the day enter into the night, and He has subjugated the sun and the moon, each running towards an appointed time, and that Allah is fully aware of what you do?”* (Qur’an 31:29). I captured the scene on video and posted it along with this verse, during the flight, on my Facebook and Twitter pages.



The plane flew over the Indian Ocean for the entire night, then entered the shores of Western Australia and passed by

the city of Perth, before crossing the Great Australian Bight and reaching the east of the country. It finally began its descent into the vast Melbourne Tullamarine Airport at *Fajr*, 5 am local time. It was now **Tuesday 8th August**. My destination was still ahead; I was scheduled to board another local flight to Sydney after two hours (my inviters wanted me to be in Melbourne on the weekend and, therefore, arranged for me to visit Sydney first). After disembarking from the plane and going through customs and immigration formalities, I performed *Fajr Ṣalāh*, collected my baggage, and immediately made my way to another (domestic flights) terminal to catch the local flight. I called the aforementioned Shaykh Mu'im and informed him of my safe arrival into Melbourne. The other terminal was only a few minutes walking distance away; thus, I reached the flight gate very quickly, for the third – albeit short – leg of my journey. The domestic flight to Sydney was slightly delayed. After a short one and a half hour flight, the plane began its descent into Sydney airport. As I looked out of the window, I could see the beautiful city of Sydney, in the brightness of the early day, on the edge of the Pacific Ocean. The airport is built near the sea and surrounded by water, with aircraft runways stretching into the bay. This made the landing very scenic. I landed at 9 am local time on Tuesday morning and – after flying for 20 hours – my journey, which began at 10 pm UK time on Sunday night, finally came to an end, *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*.







Sydney

Sydney (as mentioned previously) is the capital city of the state of New South Wales. Located on Australia's east coast, it is the largest and most populated city in Australia (although, according to a recent census, Melbourne overtook Sydney as Australia's most populous city). Greater Sydney consists of 658 suburbs, spread across 33 local government areas. Residents of the city are colloquially known as "Sydney-siders." Sydney is Australia's most expensive city, and one of the world's most expensive to reside in. Property prices, in particular, are very high. In fact, Sydney's housing market was ranked the second least affordable in the world. Muslims of this city consist of various backgrounds and ethnicities, with a large concentration of Lebanese and Turkish communities. It has the largest Muslim population. According to the 2021 census, the number of people who self-identified as Muslims in Greater Sydney constituted 329,566 people, which is 6.3% of the total population. There are approximately 120 mosques (*masajid*) and *musallah* in Sydney, several Muslim schools, and many centres catering for the Islamic education of Muslim children.

I was hosted in Sydney by Shaykh Mufti Asad Ali Shah, who is an esteemed local scholar (more about him later). Shaykh Asad was contacted by the main hosts and organizers of my entire Australia tour, the Zuhd Academy of Melbourne, and together they planned that I should spend three days in Sydney (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday). A very dear

and likeable brother, Numayr Manzur, was at the airport to receive me, on behalf of the abovementioned Shaykh Mufti Asad Ali Shah. Brother Numayr is originally from Karachi (Pakistan) and has been residing in Australia since 1998. He has a bachelor's degree in business studies and runs a halal butcher shop. I found him to be very gentle and humble, and a person who has love for the *dīn*, sacred knowledge (*ilm*) and the people of knowledge (*ahl al-ilm*). He is a close friend of Shaykh Asad Ali Shah, assisting him in his various tasks. The brother predominantly drove me around during my three-day stay in Sydney. May Allah reward him and bless him and his family. *Āmīn*.

It was the winter season here in Australia, with the temperature around 13 degrees. Australia experiences winter from June to August, when the northern hemisphere enjoys summertime. Sydney's winter is generally mild and, thus, despite being overcast and a slight drizzle, it did not feel very cold when we exited the airport building.

From the airport, brother Numayr took me for breakfast/lunch (brunch) at a halal Turkish café, called Kismet Grounds, located in the Granville area of Sydney. The café is owned by a Turkish Muslim couple, and many of its customers are Muslims. We enjoyed the healthy and quality dishes that were on offer. It was intriguing to see a robot server at the café (a robot who brings the food to one's table) for the first time! Adjacent to the café was a luxury two-bedroom apartment, which my Sydney hosts had booked for me to stay in, for the duration of my stay in Sydney. *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*, the apartment was comfortable and had all the basic facilities, including a washing machine and clothes dryer. A balcony overlooking the Sydney horizon made the

stay very enjoyable. I was able to see the sun rising each morning, which is always a great experience. After brunch, brother Numayr escorted me to the apartment. It was nearly midday and close to *Zuhr* time. After a long and tiring journey, a few hours of rest was the ultimate boost the body required.

Private Evening Gathering (Majlis)

A private, informal brothers-only gathering was arranged for 7 pm (after *'Ishā'* prayers) at a local brother's residence. Brother Numayr (our driver) and Shaykh Mufti Asad Ali Shah both came to collect me from the apartment. It was my first meeting with Shaykh Asad. Prior to my visit of Australia, I was unaware of him. He had contacted me, however, and we exchanged a few messages, a few days before my journey – in relation to my stay in Sydney. From this very first meeting, Shaykh Asad stayed with me throughout my three-day stay in Sydney and undoubtedly fulfilled the rights of the guest.

Shaykh Asad Ali Shah is a dynamic and well-learned scholar, *ma shā Allah*, and – in my opinion – a blessing for Sydney. I was impressed by the level of his knowledge (*ilm*), scholarship, and other noble qualities. Originally from Pakistan, he studied the *dars nizāmi* curriculum at the Jamia Binoria (SITE) seminary in Karachi. Thereafter, he studied the *fatwa* specialization programme (*takhassus fi 'l-fiqh wa 'l-iftā'*) at the same seminary, as well as at Jamia Hammadiyya in Karachi and Jamia Madania in Lahore. He appears to be well-read, with expertise in not only the transmitted Islamic sciences of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*, but also in theology (*ilm al-kalām*), *mantiq*, *falsafa* and other rational sciences (*'ulum al-*

'*aqliyya*). He currently runs a full-time *dars nizāmi* programme, details of which will be mentioned later. During my conversations with him over the three days, I found him to be a scholar of wisdom and balance, who has great concern for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge in Australia. He is an avid lover of my beloved teacher, Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (who isn't!), and the respected shaykh (may Allah protect him) came up frequently during our discussions. It was indeed a pleasure to meet him and spend a few days in his company. May Allah increase him and accept his efforts. *Āmīn*.

Due to the long journey and lack of sleep, when brother Numayr and Shaykh Asad Ali Shah arrived at the apartment to pick me up, I was in deep sleep. They finally managed to wake me up. At first, upon waking, I was unsure what day or time it was. The sleep invigorated me, *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*, but we were slightly delayed in reaching the location of the gathering.

We reached the location – private residence of a local brother named Ātish – closer to 8 pm. The brother has designated a small *musalla* within his house, and this is where the gathering took place. Some 40-50 brothers were in attendance. The majority were of Turkish background, whilst others from various ethnic origins such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Albania. Nothing gathered us except our common belief in Islam, *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*. The brothers all introduced themselves one at a time, and it was a pleasure to meet them all. They appeared to be enthusiastic, eager to learn, and very courteous and well-mannered, *ma shā Allah*. After a short Qur'an recitation, I was asked to share a few words of advice with the audience. This was my first ever talk

in Australia! With *tawfiq* (enablement) from Allah Most High, I spoke about building a connection with Allah through thanking Him and appreciating His bounties/blessings. I explained that we should constantly ponder over the various blessings granted to us by Allah and express thankfulness (*shukr*). Such regular reflection is also beneficial for one's mental wellbeing. I spoke for about 30 minutes, followed by a question and answer session. The questions raised by the brothers reflected their zeal and desire to learn about Islam and implement its teachings into their lives. This was my first experience of interacting with Australian Muslims and, undoubtedly, it was a very good first impression. I was pleasantly surprised by their friendliness, warmth and great character – and I experienced the same throughout my tour.

Dinner was arranged after the *majlis* at the same location. The host had prepared a delicious, healthy, non-carb meal – consisting of salmon, vegetables and other items. A series of interesting discussions took place with Shaykh Asad Ali Shah and the others who joined us. Some of those whom I remember include: Shaykh Sayf al-Hasan (of Bangladeshi origin, who is a professor of bio genetics and also studied Islamic sciences. His company throughout my stay in Sydney was enjoyable. He appeared to be intelligent and someone who has great concern for the betterment of the *umma*. May Allah bless him. *Āmīn*). Also in attendance at dinner was Shaykh Khāzin (of Lebanese background who studied at Ma'had al-Fath al-Islami in Damascus, Syria), and some other brothers whose names I am unable to recall at the moment. They all seemed knowledgeable and well-mannered, *ma shā Allah*, and it was a pleasure to meet them all. After dinner, I

bid the host and others farewell and returned to my apartment and retired to bed.





Al-Muhannad Course for ‘Ālimiyya Students

The next morning (**Wednesday 9th August, 2023**), part one of a two-part course titled “Key Themes based on *Al-Muhannad*” was scheduled, from 10:30 am to *Zuhr Ṣalāh* (1 pm), for students studying the *dars nizāmi/ālimiyya* course at the seminary (*madrasa*) run by Shaykh Asad Ali Shah.

Al-Muhannad ala ‘l-Mufannad (The Sword on the Disproved), also known as *Mabahith fi Aqa’id Ahl al-Sunna* (Discussions in the Beliefs of the People of Sunna), is an Arabic work expressing some beliefs and views held by the Sunni scholars of the Indian subcontinent affiliated to Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband. It was authored by the renowned scholar of hadīth and commentator of *Sunan Abi Dawūd* (in 20 volumes), Shaykh Mawlana Khalil Ahmad al-Saharanpuri (may Allah have mercy on his soul), and annotated by myself. The book discusses a range of controversial issues (in a question and answer format) relating to mainly secondary aspects of *aqida*, as well as other topics. It consists of answers to 26 questions on issues such as: using intermediaries in supplication to Allah (*tawassul*), visiting the grave of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him & give him peace), Prophets being alive in their graves, sending blessings in abundance upon the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him & give him peace), following one of the four Sunni Schools of Islamic law, *tasawwuf/sufism*, celebrating the *mawlid*, knowledge of Allah’s Messenger (Allah bless him & give him peace), and finality of Prophethood (*khatm al-nubuwwa*). I have previously taught the book online, available as an on-demand course here: [Discussions in the Beliefs of Ahl al-Sunna](#).

I was picked up from the apartment in the beautiful sunny morning by one of Shaykh Asad Ali Shah's students, named Abdullah (who took the opportunity to ask a few questions during our short drive), and taken to the *madrasa*. Despite officially being winter, the weather in Sydney was very pleasant, with beautiful blue skies and the sun shining.

The seminary (*madrasa*) was established by Shaykh Asad and is located in a building of the Al-Bayan Institute complex, in the Regents Park suburb of Sydney (more on Al-Bayan Institute later). Running as a non-boarding *madrasa*, it offers a six-year *ālimiyya* course, in accordance with the Indian subcontinent *dars nizāmi* programme. Classes run daily from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm. The idea is for students to study the six years and, thereafter, travel abroad to an established seminary in order to undergo the final year (*dawrat al-hadith*) under the supervision of senior scholars. Currently, there are 16 full-time students from diverse backgrounds such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Egypt and Afghanistan, of which some have completed the 4th year. Shaykh Asad Ali is the founder and principal, and teaches the majority of classes/subjects, seven days of the week. He is supplemented by other teachers who teach a class once a week. These include Shaykh Harun Kanj (of Lebanese origin who studied at Dār al-Mustafa in Yemen), Shaykh Tariq (of Lebanese origin who graduated from Ma'had al-Fath al-Islami in Damascus, Syria), and Shaykh Yasin (of Bangladeshi origin).

As we parked the car outside the *madrasa*, some students came outside to welcome me and take me upstairs to the hall where the course was scheduled to take place. Of the students I remember meeting was brother Owais, who is a 4th year

student and asked a few questions during the class. I discussed the background and context behind the writing of *Al-Muhannad*, and covered some key themes discussed in the book. The course was attended by all of the students, as well as others from outside. Out of his humility and appreciation of a guest, Shaykh Asad Ali also sat through the entire session, on the floor. I suggested that there was no need for him to attend, but he refused to accept my suggestion. The aforementioned Shaykh Professor Sayf al-Hasan also attended and asked a few beneficial questions. The students all seemed to be clued-up and were engaging throughout the sessions. Shaykh Asad Ali has, by and large, single-handedly worked on the students, and - *ma shā Allah* - his efforts are clearly visible. May Allah grant them all further success, bless them with beneficial knowledge, and grant them the best of both worlds. May Allah accept the efforts of their teachers, and grant the seminary/*madrasa* further success. *Āmīn*.







Al-Bayan Institute

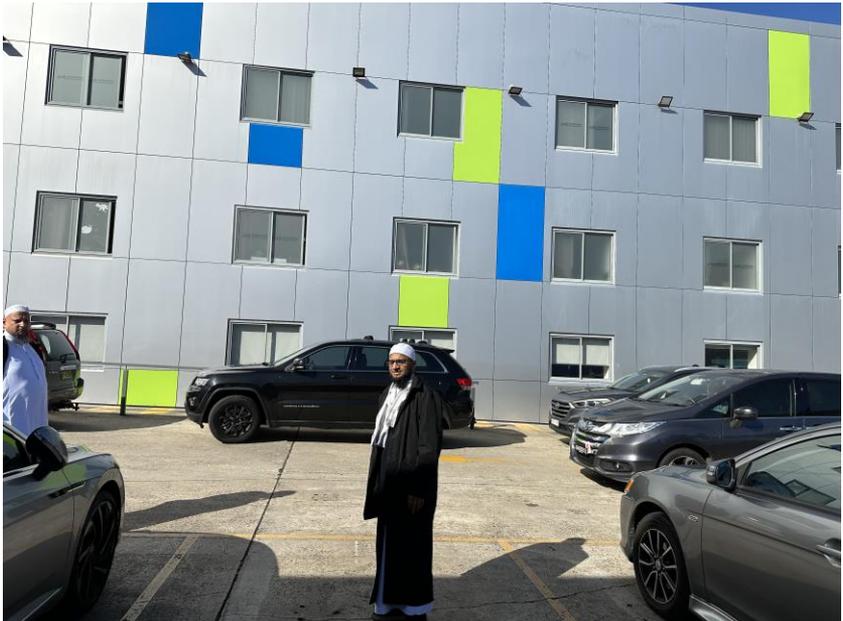
The session ended at *Zuhr*, and we all made our way to the spacious prayer hall of the Al-Bayan Institute. (As mentioned previously, Shaykh Asad operates his *madrassa* within the Al-Bayan Institute complex). Established in 2003, Al-Bayan Institute offers various services for the local community such as Qur'an memorization, Arabic, and Islamic education classes for children, as well as a syllabus encompassing a wide variety of subjects for adults. It is also actively involved in various community initiatives such as hosting youth camps and community events. The prayer hall is spacious, providing the facility for the locals to offer their daily prayers, as well as hosting regular public lectures and discourses.

After *Zuhr Ṣalāh*, I met the founder and CEO of the institute, Shaykh Tāriq al-Bikā'i (who, as mentioned, is also a teacher at Shaykh Asad Ali's *madrassa*). Shaykh Tāriq is a graduate of Ma'had al-Fath al-Islami (Damascus, Syria) and studied in Damascus around the same time as me. It transpired that we had benefited from, and studied under, similar teachers – which was an instant ice-breaker and a cause of welcome familiarity. He appeared to be humble, well-mannered, and hard-working, with a good grasp of Islamic knowledge.

It was a joy seeing young children gathered in the prayer hall, memorising the book of Allah. Shaykh Tāriq explained that children attend the *tahfīz al-qur'an* classes, five days a week, from the morning till late afternoon. As for secular studies, the children are offered home-schooling at the institute, which is then supplemented by their parents at home. The institute, however, is not registered as a school. In

my opinion, this is a very good model for the Islamic upbringing of our children, which is possible according to Australian law. In many other countries, however, such as the UK, it is illegal to have group home-schooling, conducted at an unregistered school environment. The children seemed enthusiastic and eager to learn the book of Allah and memorize it. May Allah make them the coolness of their parents' eyes, and bless them and their families. I witnessed many parents sacrificing their time, dropping off and collecting their children from the institute. May Allah grant Al-Bayan Institute further success. *Āmīn*.







Lunch and Sightseeing

Shaykh Asad hosted me for a magnificent and high-quality lunch at Volcanos Steakhouse Restaurant. A couple of other brothers also joined us. The restaurant specializes in an array of mouth-watering steaks and ribs, of premium quality. Many of their steaks are sourced from local farmers, as well as from premium quality Australian meat suppliers. The steak, fish and other items on the menu were fresh, nutritious and of high quality. The company of amazing brothers made the experience even better. This one meal entailed so many blessings of Allah, and each one required that we thank Him and express gratitude (*shukr*).

It reminded me of an incident related by Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) regarding his shaykh, Dr Abd al-Hayy Ārifi (may Allah have mercy on

him), that he was once invited to a meal with a few students. During the meal, Shaykh Dr Abd al-Hayy Ārifi mentioned how this one meal contained so many blessings of Allah: 1) The food in itself is a great favour of Allah Most High, which fulfils the human need to eat. 2) Allah made the food tasty. Had Allah wanted, the food could have been without taste and it would have still fulfilled the purpose. 3) Allah created hunger and desire for the food. Had the tasty food items been present but there was no desire to eat, the food would be of no use. 4) Allah protected us against illnesses which prevent us from eating the food. At times, tasty food is available, and one is also hungry, but one is afflicted with such illness that he can't eat. 5) Allah is feeding us in a state of wellbeing. If all of the above is available, but some disturbing news – such as the passing of a loved one – was to arrive or some calamity were to strike, one would not be able to enjoy the food. 6) Allah is feeding us with honour. We are not being disgraced whilst receiving our sustenance, and the person feeding us is doing so with great respect and love. 7) We are sat eating with friends and dear ones, rather than eating all alone. May Allah Most High grant us all the ability to be grateful and appreciate all His favours upon us. *Āmīn*.





After the delicious meal, my hosts took me for a bit of sightseeing. We went to a national park near the Revesby Heights and enjoyed the greenery, trees, river and other natural manifestations of Allah’s beautiful creation.





Gallipoli Mosque

We performed *Asr Ṣalāh* in the beautiful and magnificent mosque built by our Turkish brethren, called the Gallipoli Mosque, located in Auburn (a suburb of Sydney). With its classical Ottoman Architecture, the mosque resembles the Sultan Ahmad Masjid (Blue Mosque) and other mosques of Turkey. The mosque/*masjid* was officially opened in 1999 but, due to a lack of funding, took almost 13 years to complete. The current structure is built on the location of an earlier mosque. The mosque has a large central dome, surrounded by eight smaller semi domes, and flanked by two minarets which are 30 metres high. It can accommodate around 2,000 worshippers. There is a train line directly across the mosque, with trains passing every few mins.

It was indeed a pleasure to see such a large and wonderful mosque in Australia. As we toured and walked around the mosque complex, we met brother Muhyi al-Din at the ablution (*wudu*) fountain in the mosque courtyard. He mentioned that thousands of non-Muslims see the mosque each day whilst commuting on the trains, and some of them even come to see the mosque and express their interest in Islam. This has resulted in some locals embracing Islam, *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*.









Public Lecture at Al-Bayan Mosque

A public lecture was organised at the (previously-mentioned) Al-Bayan Institute Mosque after *'Ishā'* prayers. Many brothers and sisters were in attendance, with the spacious prayer hall relatively full. I spoke for about an hour, discussing some of the beautiful character-traits of our beloved Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) and how to bring them into our lives. The attendees seemed very engaged and attentive. This was my first experience of delivering an open, public talk in Australia. During this talk, and the subsequent ones throughout the entire tour, I was pleasantly surprised by the level of *talab* (thirst and zeal for Islamic knowledge) among the Muslims of Australia. At each event, I saw people attending in numbers and listening to the lectures with attentiveness and enthusiasm. After the talk, I met the attendees who all expressed love and brotherhood for their brother in Islam. Some of them said that they have been following my writings and work for many years, which was indeed humbling. May Allah bless them. *Āmīn*. I also met, here, Shaykh Burhan Mehter – a scholar who is originally from South Africa and moved to Sydney recently from Perth. My dear friend, Shaykh Sulayman Moola of South Africa, had introduced him to me a few days earlier at the conference in Manchester (UK). May Allah accept his efforts. *Āmīn*.





Sydney Harbour Bridge

After the lecture, in the company of Shaykh Asad Ali Shah (who constantly remained with me throughout my stay in Sydney) and our driver, I went for a brief night-time sightseeing of Sydney Harbour Bridge and the area surrounding it. The bridge is a steel-arch bridge, which crosses Sydney Harbour, and serves as the primary transportation link between Sydney and its suburbs on the northern side of the harbour. Opened in 1932, the bridge spans about 500 metres (1,650 feet), making it one of the longest steel-arch bridges in the world. Along its length, it features four railroad tracks, a highway, and two pedestrian walkways.

We parked our car and walked along the harbour, below the bridge. It was chilly, but the cool night time breeze, the river in front of us, and the Sydney central business district (CBD) skyscrapers lit up in the night sky and their shadows reflecting in the water, made the viewing experience all the more enjoyable. The bridge, harbour, and the nearby Sydney Opera House is widely regarded as an iconic image of Sydney, and of Australia itself.

We then headed back to the apartment. Along the way, we stopped by a restaurant for a light meal/dinner and continued our great discussions. After a busy day, and the effects of the long journey from the UK still being felt, a good night's sleep was very much welcomed.





Al-Muhannad Course – Part Two

The next morning (**Thursday 10th August, 2023**), at 11 am, part two of the course titled “Key Themes based on *Al-Muhannad*/Discussions in the Beliefs of *Ahl al-Sunna*” took place at the *madrasa* of Shaykh Asad Ali Shah. The students were, once again, engaging and attentive. Shaykh Asad sat through the entire session, and we were also later joined by another teacher, Shaykh Harun Kanj, whom I met for the first time. Of Lebanese origin, Shaykh Harun predominantly studied at Dar al-Mustafa in Hadhramawt, Yemen. (I visited Yemen in 2005 and wrote a detailed travelogue, after my return, which can be read here: [10 Days in the Blessed Lands of Yemen](#)). Shaykh Hurun teaches Islamic Creed (*aqida*) at the *madrasa*. He mentioned that some brothers in Sydney constantly raise the issue of Allah’s attributes, and behave harshly towards anyone who holds a different viewpoint. As my respected teacher, Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, often says that bringing up such issues, especially in Muslim minority countries where many of the youth are unaware of even the basics of religion and some even turning away from Islam altogether, is extremely blameworthy. May Allah grant us all the correct understanding. *Āmīn*.

Unfortunately, the two-day sessions were insufficient to complete the book. Nevertheless, whatever portion we were able to cover, we pray that Allah accept from us and grant us beneficial knowledge. *Āmīn*.

Blue Mountains

Today after *Zuhr Ṣalāh*, my hosts had arranged a visit to the Blue Mountains – a world heritage region west of Sydney,

known for its stunning natural beauty and breath-taking scenery. Our small group consisted of Shaykh Asad Ali, the above-mentioned Professor Sayf al-Hasan, and our driver, Numayr Manzur. The drive was approximately two hours long. We took a light meal with us to have on the way, and engaged in various interesting and beneficial discussions along the way such as the subcontinent seminaries, scholars, books and some *fiqh* issues.

We reached the Blue Mountains region around 4pm. Despite the fact that it was technically winter here in Australia, the sun was shining – although, it felt a bit cold due to the wind. The Blue Mountains get their name from the natural blue haze created by vast eucalypt forests in this world heritage area. Tiny droplets of oil, released from the trees, mix with water vapour and sunlight to produce the distinctive colour. In front of us was a place of extraordinary natural beauty – offering breath-taking views of deep forested valleys, lush green meadows, clear blue skies, and soaring sandstone cliffs. In the distance was the glorious rock formation, known as the Three Sisters, featuring three enormous rocks on top of a sandstone cliff. We stood marvelling at the stunning scenery and could not resist but repeat, “*So, glorious is Allah, the Best of the Creators*” (Qur’an 23:14). We offered *Asr Ṣalāh* outdoors near the Blue Mountains, and then made our way back to Sydney in time for *Maghrib*.









Talk at Ernest Street Mosque (Lakemba)

After *'Ishā' Ṣalāh*, I delivered a talk titled "Islam and Modern Challenges" at the Ernest Street Mosque in the Lakemba area of Sydney. The mosque was full and people listened very attentively, *Al-Hamdulillāh*. The audience predominantly consisted of Bangladeshi origin Muslims, as well as those from other backgrounds. The previously-mentioned brother, Professor Shaykh Sayf al-Hasan, introduced me with his kind and gracious words; may Allah bless him. I spoke for about an hour, focusing on the challenges of living in Muslim minority countries, especially challenges related to the upbringing (*tarbiya*) of our children. I also spoke about dealing with the challenges of liberalism, feminism and modernism. I pray and hope the talk, which included a brief question and answer session, was beneficial.

Dinner with Local Scholars

Dinner was arranged, after the talk, at the residence of a local brother called Arshad (may Allah bless him). Shaykh Asad Ali had invited scholars and imams from in and around

Sydney, so that I have the opportunity and honour of meeting them and benefiting from their company. Amongst those who blessed us with their presence include: 1) Shaykh Ashfāq Akbar, whose smile and demeanour lit up our dinner meeting. He studied at Jāmi'ah Dār al-'Ulūm in Karachi (Pakistan), and mentioned to me that he had the honour of staying at the residence of Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani while undergoing his studies there. Currently, he serves as an imam and runs a *madrasa* and community centre, focussing particularly on the youth. 2) Shaykh Abd al-Karim; he is originally from Fiji Island, and serves as an imam and runs a *madrasa*. 3) Shaykh Mawlana Umar Aldridge; he is an Australian revert to Islam and studied in Melbourne. He currently runs a *madrasa* and full time *tahfīz al-Qur'an* classes, and other youth programs. 4) Qari Hasan Qadhi; he is originally from South Africa, and serves as imam and runs a *madrasa*. 5) Mawlana Yasīn; he is an imam at Al-Bayan Institute and runs the full time *tahfīz* programme there. May Allah accept their efforts, reward them, and grant them all sincerity and further success in their endeavours. *Āmīn*.

After dinner, I bid them farewell and gifted them a copy each of my two recently published books (travelogues): [*Two Weeks in Pakistan*](#) and [*A Trip to the Land of Scholars and Saints*](#). We, thereafter, headed back to my apartment. This was my last night in Sydney, as I had a flight to Melbourne the following morning.

Departure to Melbourne

The next day was *Jumu'a* (**Friday 11th August, 2023**), and I had a morning flight scheduled at around 8:30 am to Melbourne. Shaykh Asad Ali and brother Numayr picked me

up from the apartment and escorted me to the airport. I remember stopping, along the way, at a local café for some coffee. The coffee in Australia is very tasty and wholesome, especially in Melbourne (where I was about to go) which is known as the “Coffee Capital of Australia.” The café had “Dirty Chai” advertised on its menu. Upon enquiring, we were informed that it is a chai latte with a shot of espresso, i.e. chai (tea) mixed with coffee! We reached the airport on time, and I thanked my Sydney hosts for the wonderful hospitality and bid them farewell. May Allah reward them in abundance, and hopefully we can meet again soon, *’In shā’Allah*.

The flight duration to Melbourne was approximately an hour and a half. The plane landed in the Capital of Victoria at 10 am local time. Since this was a local flight, there were no immigration formalities and, thus, I was out of the airport terminal building within a few minutes, *Al-hamdulillah*.



Melbourne

Melbourne (as mentioned previously) is the capital of the Australian state of Victoria, and located in the south-eastern part of mainland Australia. It is the second largest and second most populous city of Australia, after Sydney (although, according to a recent census, Melbourne overtook Sydney as Australia's most populous city for the first time since the 19th century). Greater Melbourne covers a huge geographical area and consists of Melbourne city and a further 30 municipalities. Residents of Melbourne are commonly referred to as "Melburnians". The surrounding areas are filled with gold mines on account of which this city holds great importance in trade and economic circles. Most of the buildings have a British appearance, but closer to the ocean, the skyscrapers resemble North American buildings. Melbourne is well-known for its unpredictable weather conditions, mainly due to it being located on the boundary of hot inland areas and the cool southern ocean. It is often said to have four seasons in one day!

Muslims of this city also originate from various backgrounds and ethnicities, and their numbers are also second only to Sydney. According to the 2021 census, the number of people who self-identified as Muslims in Greater Melbourne constituted 258,250 people, which is 5.3% of its total population. There are approximately 100 mosques (*masajid*) and prayer rooms (*musalla*), several Muslim schools,

madrasas, and centres catering for the Islamic education of Muslim children.

I was hosted in Melbourne by Shaykh Mawlana Mu'im Siddiqui and Shaykh Dr Sāmi al-Hashmi (both of whom, as mentioned at the beginning of this travelogue, were the main organizers of my entire Australia tour). The plan was to spend the next three days (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) here in Melbourne. Shaykh Mu'im and Dr Sāmi were present at the airport to receive me. I had met Shaykh Mu'im before, but it was my first meeting with Dr Sāmi and, *ma shā Allah*, I was impressed with his character, demeanour and elegance.

From the airport, we headed straight to the residence of Dr Sāmi where my accommodation was arranged, for the duration of my stay in Melbourne. Dr Sāmi (with his family), his brother Sa'd Mu'id (with his family), and their mother, live in a spacious house in Williams Landing (a suburb of West Melbourne). An entire separate and comfortable area (suite), within the house, was reserved for me. I was informed that scholars and guests regularly reside here during their visits. The entire family seem very blessed with noble qualities, *ma shā Allah*. Their hospitality was above and beyond what I deserved, and they certainly fulfilled the rights of a guest. May Allah reward them and grant them the good of this life and the next. *Āmīn*.



Jumu'a in Dandenong

After partaking a healthy light breakfast, we set out for Dandenong where I was scheduled to deliver the *Jumu'a Khutba* and lead Friday Prayers. Dr Sāmi's brother, Sa'd Mu'id al-Hashmi, drove me to the location. It was my first meeting with Brother Sa'd and he, too, like his brother, appeared to be a person of great character (*akhlaq*) and gentleness. He works in the IT field and runs his own business dealing in custom-made and quality Islamic attire. He also studied Islamic sciences in the UAE, and speaks Arabic fluently. He constantly remained with me during my stay in Melbourne. Due to his IT background, in his spare time, he produces quality content comprising lectures of scholars. He video-recorded all my lectures/lessons in Melbourne and uploaded their full versions, as well as short clips. It was great to know him and discuss various matters during the three days in Melbourne. May Allah reward his efforts and bless him. *Āmīn.*

The drive to Dandenong – a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne – took approximately one hour. The suburb is home to one of the largest immigrant populations in Australia, with residents originating from Turkey, Albania, China, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. A dear friend of mine, Shaykh Mufti Ziyād Rāwat, has established an institute here, called Dār al-Arḳam. Originally from Johannesburg (South Africa), Shaykh Ziyād studied in South Africa, the subcontinent and Syria. After providing his services in South Africa and other places, he moved to Australia in 2008 and served as an imam in Gold Coast and a teacher in Brisbane. He then relocated to the Dandenong area of Melbourne. The Dār al-Arḳam Institute was established in early 2019, and

provides educational courses, wellbeing support, women's programs, *da'wa* and revert care, youth programs, and welfare support to the poor and needy. I first met Shaykh Ziyād in April 2019, during my visit to Uzbekistan, and since then we remained in contact. He is humble, balanced, energetic and hard-working, *ma shā Allah*, and has great concern for the Muslims and humanity in general. Unfortunately, he was abroad (in Yemen with his students) during my visit and, thus, we were unable to meet. He messaged me, however, a few days prior to my travel, expressing sadness that we will be unable to meet and insisting that I should visit his institute and deliver the *Jumu'a Khutba*.

Dār al-Arqam arranges *Jumu'a* Prayers in a spacious community hall, located a short distance away from its premises. I first delivered a talk in English on "[Protecting the *imān* and Islamic Identity of our Children/Future Generations](#)." Thereafter, I delivered the Arabic sermon (*khutba*) and led prayers. Shaykh Ziyād, despite being engaged with his activities abroad, remained in contact and ensured everything ran smoothly.







After *Jumu'a*, upon his direction, I visited the institute, in the nearby Hallam suburb, and was given a short tour by one of the volunteers, named Arsalān. He briefed me about its various activities. It was pleasing to see the institute premises, comprising a *musalla*, classrooms for students, and offices used for providing services for the local community such as counselling. The institute also houses a purpose built studio to broadcast Islamic lectures, discourses and panel discussions. I was asked to have a short video message recorded on “addressing marital problems” – to be posted on their online portal. Thereafter, we went to a local restaurant for lunch in the company of Sa'd Mu'id, Arsalān and Shaykh Mu'im. May Allah accept the efforts of Dār al-Arḩam Institute. *Āmīn*.





Evening Lecture at UMMA Centre (Doncaster)

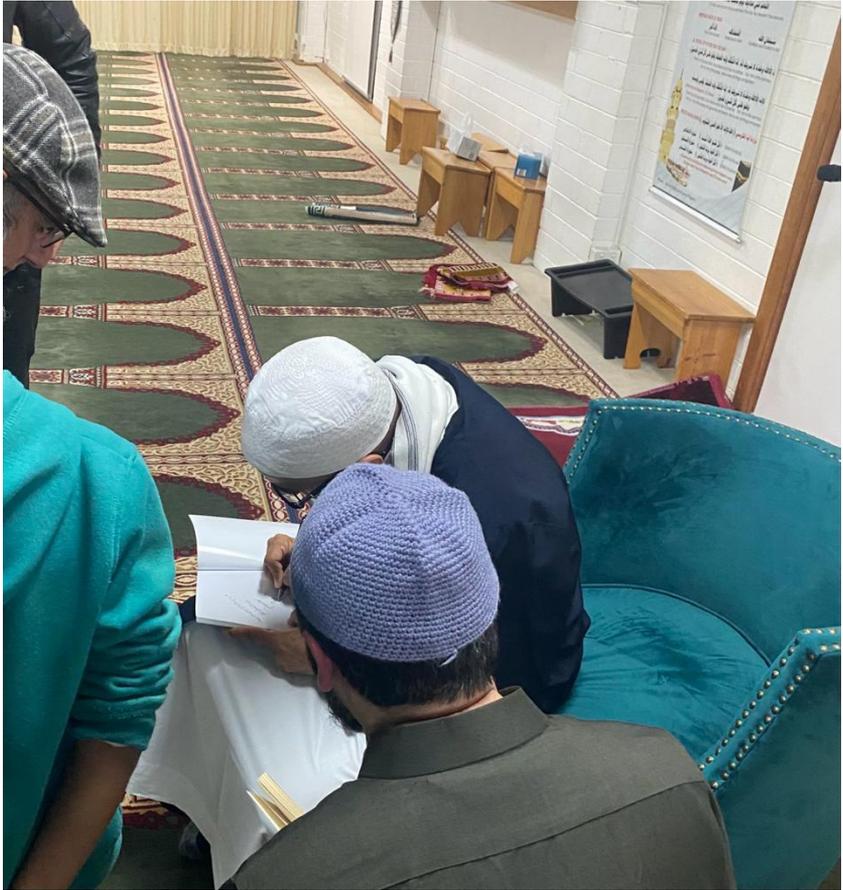
After some rest and performing *Asr* and *Maghrib* Prayers, we made our way to the UMMA Centre for my post *'Ishā'* lecture on the topic of improving relationships. The mosque/centre is situated in Doncaster, a north-eastern suburb of Melbourne. UMMA stands for "United Muslim Migrants Association." The community here is made up of diverse cultural backgrounds and professions, and established for over 35 years.

The imam of the mosque/centre is Shaykh Khalid Shah, whom I have known for a few years. He visited me in the UK a few years back, and we remained in contact since then. Shaykh Khalid was born in Brazil but raised in Australia. His late father was also a scholar and served as an imam for many years (may Allah have mercy on him). Shaykh Khalid studied the *dars nizāmi/ālimiyya* course locally, at the Dār al-'Ulūm in Melbourne, hence he is amongst the batch of locally trained Islamic scholars. He continues to further his knowledge via online courses, and is involved in different initiatives such as the establishment of *makātib* and *madāris* (Islamic educational classes for children), and teaching online courses.

We reached the UMMA Centre Mosque in time for *'Ishā'* *Ṣalāh*. After prayers, Shaykh Khalid introduced me with his kind words, after which I delivered my lecture on how to improve family and other relationships. Some of the attendees mentioned to me that they had undertaken some of my [online courses](#), with some even stating that they had been following my works for a number of years. Out of their zeal and good opinion, some brothers followed me around Melbourne and attended all my lectures; may Allah bless

them. I met a brother called Muhammad Ali Khan who, to my surprise, mentioned that he had been listening to my lectures since around 2005! He, along with his two brothers, attended all my Melbourne events. His father, despite being elderly and somewhat frail, also accompanied them to every programme. The entire family seem very dedicated and blessed, *ma shā Allah*. Brother Muhammad Ali brought along some of my authored books with him and asked me to sign them for him. I also met, here, Mawlana Ahmad Jariwala; a young graduate of the local Dār al-'Ulūm and currently undergoing the *fatwa* specialization (*iftā'*) course. I also met Brother Abdul Basit Karim. Both brothers are currently attending my online course. It was a pleasure to meet them all. Their expressions of love and brotherhood towards me was humbling. May Allah bless them and grant us all the good of this life and the next. *Āmīn*.

After taking leave from the UMMA Centre, we headed back to the house of Dr Sāmi. His family had prepared a nutritious dinner which we all enjoyed, *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*. Thereafter, I retired to bed for much-needed rest.









Marriage Workshop at Dār al-Hikma

The next morning (**Saturday 12th August, 2023**), part one of a two-part course/workshop –titled, “Marriage, Love & Family” – was scheduled from around 11 am to *Zuhr Ṣalāh*, at the Dār al-Hikma Institute in the Fawkner area of Melbourne. Fawkner is famous for its large Muslim presence. According to the 2021 census, the largest single religion in Fawkner was Islam, with 34.7% of the residents identifying themselves as Muslims. The majority of Muslims here are from Pakistani and Indian backgrounds, with Urdu described as the language most used at home (other than English). Fawkner is also home to the famous Dār al-‘Ulūm College, details of which I shall mention shortly. The workshop was held at Dār al-Hikma Institute, which was founded by a graduate of the Dār al-‘Ulūm, Shaykh Mufti Umar Syed. He also studied in Pakistan, and appeared to be a very humble, likeable and balanced individual. The institute caters for the local community, offering short courses for children and adults, and focusing on running *makātib* (after-school Islamic classes for children). May Allah grant acceptance and success. *Āmīn*.

We arrived at the institute just after 11 am. Those who registered to attend the weekend workshop were already in attendance. Some 100 brothers and sisters, including students of knowledge (*tullab al-ilm*) and graduate scholars were present. On this first day of the workshop, we discussed the importance, virtues and objectives of marriage, selecting a suitable spouse, engagements, marriage ceremonies and simplicity in marriages, amongst other topics. The session ended with an extended question and answer session. *Al-Hamdulillāh*, the feedback from the attendees was very

positive, and they said that many aspects relating to marriage became clarified.









Dār al-‘Ulūm College

After the workshop and *Zuhr*, I visited the nearby-situated Dār al-‘Ulūm College. Established in 1997, the Dār al-‘Ulūm is a famous and long-standing seminary of Islamic learning which caters for the educational needs of Muslims of Melbourne and beyond. When my respected teacher, Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqī Usmani (may Allah protect him), toured Australia in 2000, he visited the Dār al-‘Ulūm. He then penned the following remarks in his Urdu travelogue:

“The Dār al-‘Ulūm was established a couple of years ago and has, with Allah’s Grace, now acquired a large building which was formerly a school. It was, therefore, most suitable for this project. They are temporarily using a hall of this building to offer prayers. There is a large, empty piece of land outside this hall, and this is where they intend to erect a *masjid*/mosque. At present (in 2000), the Dār al-‘Ulūm College caters for male and female students up to grade nine. Together with the complete secular syllabus, they are taught Islamic sciences and importance is given to their Islamic upbringing (*tarbiya*). From their uniforms to time-management, in every aspect, the spirit and essence of religion is noticeable. Currently, there are 300 male and female students. This year, they initiated the first year of the *dars nizāmi* curriculum. The Muslim residents of the city very enthusiastically enrol their children into this seminary; long queues of cars are visible during the mornings and evenings, dropping off and picking up their children. Some parents even travel the distance of two hours. There is an overwhelming demand, and many children are not enrolled

because the college/seminary is unable to cater for more than 300 students.

I (i.e. Shaykh Muhammad Taqī Usmani in 2000) was shown around the college after *Zuḥr Ṣalāh*. *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*, the orderly set up, standard of education and *tarbiya*, and a general good Islamic vibe, in and around the college, brought happiness to my heart. The library is also, considering the location, invaluable – with a significant collection of Arabic, English and Urdu books which continue increasing. After touring the college, I addressed the male and female teachers. The English language is used as a medium of teaching. Since the teachers hail from different nationalities, there is no other language apart from English which is commonly understood by everyone. Therefore, my lecture on the “Duties of the Teachers” was also delivered in English.” (*The World Before Me*, p.198-199)

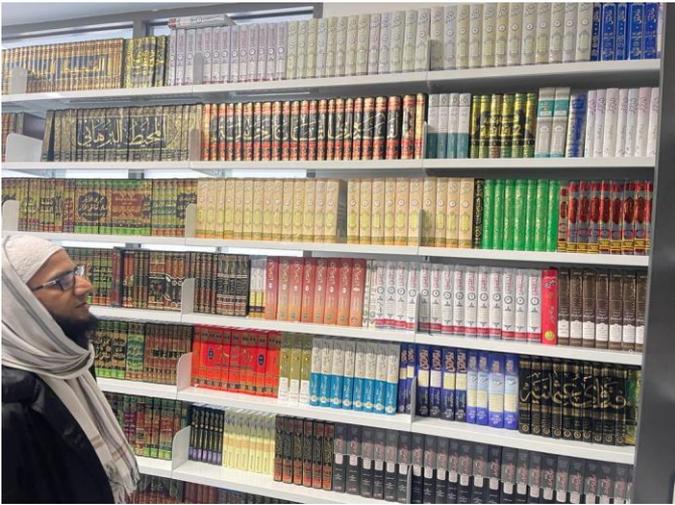
The above was written by the respected shaykh in 2000 and, as a result of reading it, I had a desire to visit the Dār al-‘Ulūm. A lovely brother, Mawlana Ahmad Jariwala (whom I mentioned previously as having graduated from the Dār al-‘Ulūm and currently undergoing the *iftā’* course), escorted me in his car to the Dār al-‘Ulūm. Dr Sāmi and some other brothers also joined us. I was informed that 1300 male and female students are currently studying at the Dār al-‘Ulūm. The *ālīmiyya/dars nizāmi* syllabus is taught in English and Arabic, with the final year (*dawrat al-hadith*) taught exclusively in Arabic. Mawlana Ahmad is one of five students studying the *iftā’* course this year. One of my dear friends from Dār al-‘Ulūm Karachi (Pakistan), Shaykh Mufti Najīb Khan, was sent by Mufti Muhammad Taqī Usmani to Australia in the late 90s. He served as a deputy head teacher and mufti at this Dār al-

‘Ulūm in those early years, and then returned to Pakistan. I was informed that he also conducts a lesson in the *iftā’* course via online. I called him from Australia and notified him that I was visiting the country. He expressed happiness and mentioned that it brought back memories.

The Dār al-‘Ulūm building is now beautifully erected, hosting a big prayer hall (*masjid*) in the centre. We also visited the library and I was impressed by the collection of books, *ma shā Allah*. To date, many students, born and/or raised in Australia, have studied here. The Dār al-‘Ulūm suffices them – to an extent – from having to travel abroad. I met several graduate scholars throughout Australia who mentioned that they studied at the Dār al-‘Ulūm. I pray Allah grant it further success and enable it to serve the Australian communities with sincerity for a long time. *Āmīn*.









Evening Lecture in Melton

An event was organised after *Maghrib* Prayers by the Islamic Community Centre (ICC) of Melton (a suburb on the outskirts of Melbourne). Accordingly, after taking some rest and performing *Asr Ṣalāh*, we headed to a community hall in Melton which the ICC hired for the event. The ICC is headed by the previously-mentioned Shaykh Mu'im, and it is in the process of building a mosque/*masjid* in the Melton area.

Maghrib Ṣalāh was performed at the hall, after which the event commenced. A senior and respected local scholar, Shaykh Mufti Munīb Ahmad (may Allah protect him), spoke before me in Urdu. The shaykh studied in the mid-70s at the famous Jami'ah Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi (in Pakistan, completing his *ālīmiyya* and *fatwa* specialization (*iftā'*) course there. He also has the honour of studying under the former Grand Mufti of Pakistan and father Mufti Muhammad Taqī Usmani, Shaykh Mawlana Mufti Muhammad Shafī' (may Allah have mercy on him). In fact, Mufti Muhammad Shafī' passed away when Mufti Munīb Ahmad was in his second year of the *fatwa* specialization course. After completing his studies, he became a teacher at the same Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi. He initially visited Australia in 1986 to lead *tarawih* prayers, and then moved here, around the late 90s, serving the Melbourne community. He is a successful and long-term teacher of the abovementioned Dār al-'Ulūm College in Fawkner, with many *huffaz* and young scholars of Australia having the honour of studying under him. My host, Shaykh Mu'im, is his son-in-law.

In his brief Urdu discourse, Shaykh Mufti Munīb Ahmad advised the *ulamā* to inculcate the qualities of sincerity (*ikhlās*)

and Allah-consciousness (*taqwa*) in to their lives. It was my first time meeting the shaykh. He appeared to be humble and a man of piety and deep understanding. Out of his humility, he mentioned that his main intention in attending the event was to meet this writer, which really was embarrassing. In fact, it was my honour and pleasure to meet him. He blessed us with his presence despite being elderly and somewhat ill. Undoubtedly, he is a blessing for the Muslims of Australia. May Allah grant him a long life with wellbeing. *Āmīn*.

I thereafter spoke for approximately an hour, discussing the four objectives of prophet-hood. The Qur'an outlines four basic duties of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): 1) teaching how to recite the Book of Allah, 2) teaching the meanings of the Book of Allah, 3) teaching wisdom (*hikma*), and 4) spiritually purifying others from blameworthy character-traits. This was the job description of Allah's beloved Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), and he was successful in all his duties. The lecture hall was relatively full, with approximately 150 brothers and sisters (in a separate room) in attendance. They listened attentively, and offered words of encouragement after the talk.

Dinner was served, after the event, at the house of Shaykh Mu'im. The respected Shaykh Mufti Munib Ahmad was also in attendance, along with his sons who are also graduate scholars. It was great to get to know all of them and engage in interesting discussions. May Allah bless the entire family. *Āmīn*.





Scholars (Ulamā) Meeting

My hosts had arranged a scholars meeting. Accordingly, after dinner, we made our way to the ICC *maktab/madrasa* where it was scheduled to take place. Upon reaching, I was surprised to see some 60-70 imams, scholars, young graduates, and students of knowledge – from various parts of Melbourne – assembled. It was an absolute pleasure and honour to spend some time in their company, *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*. A couple of somewhat senior scholars also blessed us with

their presence such as Shaykh Mawlana Muhammad Wasim Khan.

The meeting was informal, diversified with refreshments, and allowed for some beneficial discussions. Despite not being worthy, I was asked to share some words of advice and answer some of their questions. Amongst other things, I suggested that an “imam course” should be developed alongside the full *ālīmiyya/dars nizāmi* programme. This course would be aimed at those who do not have the time or credentials to study the *ālīmiyya* programme, but, nevertheless, want to acquire essential Islamic knowledge in order to take on the imam position at a mosque. The length of this course would be shorter than the full *ālīmiyya* programme. Other discussions centred on unity, working in collaboration with others, and not disuniting on the basis of minor issues.

A common question raised was that many of them felt Australia was trailing behind the UK in terms of Islamic atmosphere and establishment of mosques, *madrasas*, and Islamic institutes. They wanted to know how to improve and what steps should be taken. I responded by emphasising that a complex of inferiority should be avoided. Indeed, we can all improve and learn from others, but – I explained – much good exists in their country as well. There are many mosques, Islamic centres, *madrasas*, and seminaries in Australia. I highlighted the example of the Dār al-‘Ulūm in Fawkner, where Arabic is used as a medium of teaching. Even in many UK Dār al-‘Ulūms, Arabic is not used as a medium of instruction. *Ma shā Allah*, they all appeared to be of good character, understanding and balance. May Allah bless them, and increase them in knowledge, practice and wisdom. *Āmīn*.

After the meeting, we headed back to the house for some rest. The second day of my stay in Melbourne had come to an end.







Some Morning Sightseeing

On the following morning (**Sunday 13th August, 2023**), the second part of the “Marriage, Love & Family” Course/Workshop took place at Dar al-Hikma (in Fawkner). On the way, Dr Sāmi al-Hashmi (my host) took me for a drive along a coastal road which leads to the Great Ocean Road. If you look at the map of Australia, you will notice a horsehead-shaped enclosed bay, just below Melbourne and Southern Victoria. This is called the “Port Phillip Bay.” The scenery before my eyes was stunning – comprising lush green fields and trees, sandy beach, and the dark blue water below blue skies. We walked around the Werribee South Foreshore – an untouched coastline, which is a hub for recreational boating, fishing, and a popular spot for picnics, with stunning views

across Port Phillip Bay. Since it was winter, the coastline was empty and gave a feeling of serenity. These few moments of enjoying spectacular scenery, morning breeze, and calmness proved the ultimate tonic in rejuvenating the body ahead of another busy day, *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*.





Marriage Workshop (Part Two)

Thereafter, we proceeded to Dar al-Hikma for part two of the course/workshop titled “Marriage, Love & Family.” Once again, the attendees had arrived early and listened attentively throughout. Today we discussed, amongst other things, marital responsibilities and rights of the spouses, addressing marriage problems, living a marital life in accordance with Islamic teachings, and feminism. The session ended with an extended question and answer session. May Allah accept from us all. *Āmīn*.



Melbourne Central Business District and Eureka Tower

After *Zuhr*, in the company of the aforementioned Sa'd Mu'id (brother of Dr Sāmi) and Shaykh Mu'im, I went for a sightseeing tour of Melbourne's Central Business District (also known as "The City" or "CBD"). The CBD is the main urban area of Melbourne, with skyscrapers resembling North American buildings. It felt as though I was in downtown Toronto or New York. Some suburban areas of Melbourne resemble the UK, thus, the city is a mix between the UK and North America. The delicious Melbourne coffee was once again enjoyed by all of us. In fact, I had the pleasure of drinking coffee almost every day whilst in Australia. Melbourne's coffee excellence lies in an unwavering commitment to develop and source the finest coffee beans, and using the best methods and equipment, to make the coffee. Cafés in Melbourne collaborate with specialty coffee-producers globally to bring the highest quality beans to its customers. Although considered at the lower end, I particularly enjoyed the 7-Eleven's freshly ground coffee, which was readily available at gas stations. If you ever travel to Australia, and especially Melbourne, do not miss out on the coffee!

Among the CDB skyscrapers is the famous Eureka Tower. Standing at 297.3 metres (975 ft), it is one of Australia's tallest buildings. Construction on it began in 2002, and the exterior was completed in 2006. From 2006 to 2020, it was the tallest building in Melbourne, until the topping out of Australia 108 (which is next to it). It is currently the third tallest building in Australia, behind the Q1 in Queensland and Australia 108.

We purchased tickets for the Eureka Tower and ascended to the 88th floor observation deck (the southern hemisphere's highest viewing point) in just 30 seconds on a swift elevator ride. The bird's eye view of the immediate Central Business District, and Melbourne city and the surrounding areas in the distance, was awe-inspiring. It was a bright and clear day, hence the city was visible up to a long distance. Standing up close to the glass and looking straight down at the streets below was pretty surreal. An extra ticket was required for 'The Edge' experience. The Edge is a glass cube which extends 3 meters from inside of the tower to the outside of the building. The cube floor is built with thick glass, and we were informed that the cube holds up to 10 tons. No personal items are allowed in the Edge. Attended safety-boxes are provided to store personal items during your Edge time. The experience was surreal and, for some, can be scary. The time spent at the Eureka Tower was fascinating, to say the least.









Evening Lecture at the Melbourne Grand Mosque

We came down the Eureka Tower, performed *Asr Ṣalāh* at a nearby *musalla*, and made our way to the Melbourne Grand Mosque (MGM). My lecture – my final one in Melbourne – was scheduled after *Maghrib Ṣalāh*. The mosque (*masjid*), located about 25 kilometres west of the CBD in Tarneit, is relatively new and opened its doors only recently in 2022. It is indeed grand, impressive, and well-constructed with great architecture. It comprises a large prayer hall and spacious car park, and offers various facilities for the local community.

I spoke for about 45 minutes on “[The Dangers of using Social Media and Smartphones](#),” followed by a short question and answer session. I met the imam, Shaykh Haris Siddiqui, who welcomed me with a lot of warmth. I felt that the audience was engaged, attentive, and appreciative. A few brothers (whom I have mentioned previously) who followed me around Melbourne, attending every lecture, were also in attendance despite the long distance. I bid them all farewell here; may Allah reward and bless them. *Āmīn*.

The gruelling three-day Melbourne schedule had come to an end. This was my last night in Melbourne, as we had a flight to Canberra the following day. We headed back to the house, had dinner, and retired to bed.





Departure to Canberra

The next day (**Monday 14th August, 2023**), I had a 12 pm flight for the city of Canberra. As such, after some rest in the morning and breakfast, it was time to bid farewell to my hosts: Dr Sāmi al-Hashmi, his brother, Sa'd Mu'id al-Hashmi, and their family (whose house I was staying at). May Allah reward them for their wonderful hospitality and bless them in this life and the next. *Āmīn*. My other host, Shaykh Mawlana Mu'im Ahmad, joined me, and we were both dropped off to the airport. The flight duration was approximately one hour. We landed in Canberra around 1 pm local time. Once again, due to it being a local flight, there were no immigration formalities.



Canberra

Canberra is the capital city of Australia and located between Sydney and Melbourne in south-eastern Australia. Before visiting Australia, I had not even heard of it, let alone know that it is Australia's national capital (I kept calling it Cranberry!). Following a long dispute over whether Sydney or Melbourne should be the capital, a compromise was reached in that the new capital would be in between the two cities – although it is much closer to Sydney than it is to Melbourne (280 km inland of Sydney and 660 km from Melbourne). Canberra lies in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The ACT sits as an enclave within New South Wales (NSW), although it operates as a self-governing territory. As the seat of the Government of Australia, Canberra is home to many important institutions of the federal government, national monuments, and museums. This includes the Parliament House, Government House, the High Court, and the headquarters of numerous government agencies. It hosts all foreign embassies in Australia, as well as regional headquarters of many international organisations.

Compared to other major Australian cities, Canberra is small but ranked among the world's best cities to live in and visit. It is now the third most expensive city in Australia, with the cost of housing particularly high. The city, however, has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country and the highest average wages. Over a quarter of its residents are born overseas, with English, Chinese and Indian people being the

predominant overseas-born Canberrans. The city also has a substantial student population, with many foreign students studying at various major universities. Canberra is relatively cool by Australian standards and has a mostly dry climate, although it can get very warm during the summer months.

Muslims residing in Canberra originate from India, Pakistan, Somalia, and Middle Eastern and African countries. In comparison to Sydney and Melbourne, their numbers are significantly less. However, from around 30 or so Muslim families in the early 1970s, the Muslim population in Canberra and its surrounding regions has grown tremendously, with an estimate of over 20,000 identifying themselves as Muslims. Many of them work in government and strategic departments, including embassies, and other professional sectors such as public administration and safety, scientific and technical services, health care, and education. Some reside here on a temporary or long-term basis as a visiting professional, and then return back to their countries. I was informed that there are four mosques (*masajid*) and some prayer rooms (*musallas*) in Cranberry, and a few Islamic education classes for children.

We (myself and Shaykh Mu'im of Melbourne) were hosted in Canberra by one of the city's main mosques, the Gungahlin Mosque. My lectures and discourses, over the next two days (Monday and Tuesday), predominantly took place at this mosque. We were received at the airport by Faruq Malik. Brother Faruq has been residing in Canberra for more than 20 years, and played a key role in the foundation of the Gungahlin Mosque. He also served as a vice-president of the mosque's committee, and is involved with a number of Islamic projects. He predominantly drove us around during

our stay in Canberra. Shaykh Mu'im spent a few years serving as imam at a *musalla* in Canberra, thus Brother Faruq, as well as others, had acquaintance with him. Brother Faruq really looked after us well and fulfilled the rights of honouring guests. He has been undergoing some health issues recently. I pray Allah Almighty grant him wellbeing and bless him and his family. *Āmīn*.

Gungahlin Mosque

From the airport, we headed straight to the mosque to perform *Zuhr Ṣalāh* and eat lunch. The mosque is located in Gungahlin – a suburb, north of Canberra. Situated in the middle of a residential community, the mosque took many years to build. Planning had begun in 2001 and building approval was granted in 2012, but a Christian group, who called themselves the “Concerned Citizens of Canberra”, appealed against its construction. Following a protracted court battle in the Supreme Court, the judge ruled in favour of the local Muslim community. The spacious 500-capacity mosque was finally built and completed in 2018; hence, it is a relatively new mosque. There is an expansive parking space outside, from where one is able to enjoy pleasant scenery of beautiful, lush green mountains in the horizon.



We reached the mosque just in time to perform *Zuhr* Prayers. Thereafter, we met and sat with Shaykh Hatim Sa'd,

the chief imam of the mosque. Shaykh Hatim is originally from Egypt, who initially came to Australia to study at the University. He has a PhD in Physics. Since he had memorized the Qur'an and mastered *tajwīd*, the local community requested him to lead *tarawīh* prayers during Ramadan. He then stayed over and, subsequently, assumed the imam post at the mosque. Along with leading the congregation and serving as imam, he dedicates much of his time to teaching the children of the community. He set up Qur'an memorization (*tahfīz al-qur'an*) classes, and a number of students have memorized the entire Qur'an. I enjoyed listening to his beautiful reaction during prayers. May Allah accept his efforts. *Āmīn*.

After lunch at the mosque, we were escorted to a hotel – located close to the mosque in Gungahlin Town Centre – which our hosts had booked for us. *Al-Ḥamdulillāh*, a couple of hours at the hotel offered a much-needed opportunity to rest and freshen up before back-to-back lectures in the evening.

Lectures at the Gungahlin Mosque

Two lectures were scheduled in the evening of Monday 14th August at Gungahlin Mosque; one at 6 pm after *Maghrib* and the other after *'Ishā'*. As such, we departed the hotel and reached the mosque in time for *Maghrib*. After prayers, Shaykh Hatim (the imam) commenced the programme with his beautiful recitation and, thereafter, Shaykh Mu'im introduced me with his kind words. I delivered a lecture for approximately 45 minutes on "Understanding Modern Challenges faced by the Youth" in which I discussed the importance of protecting the *iman* of our children and the

younger generation, their Islamic upbringing (*tarbiya*), and Islamic education. I also discussed the challenges related to relationships, sexuality and sex education. The lecture was attended predominantly by the youth and some elder teens. A short question and answer session followed, in which the youth asked their questions and sought clarification on some of their concerns. We performed *Ishā'* Prayers and, thereafter, I delivered a talk on "Solving Family Issues according to the Qur'an and Sunna." I discussed, in about one hour, the main causes and reasons behind family disputes and how to solve them.

On the following (Tuesday) evening, too, I delivered a talk at the same mosque (*masjid*) after *Ishā'* on "*Tarbiya* of Children & the Dangers of Social Media." I first discussed Islam and Muslims, and the history of *madrasas* and Islamic seminaries, in the UK. Thereafter, I discussed the dangers of social media and how to protect our children from its negative effects.

Al-Ḥamdulillāh, all the lectures here were well-attended, with the prayer hall relatively full. I felt that the audience were engaged and appreciative. In such places, one realizes how much people value and appreciate Islamic knowledge, due to the lack of opportunities. As with all the other places I visited in Australia, many brothers insisted that I should visit them again. May Allah bless them and grant goodness to this community. *Āmīn*. After dinner at the mosque, we returned to the hotel for the night.





Canberra Sightseeing

The next day (**Tuesday 15th August, 2023**) was my final full day in Canberra and in Australia. After some rest in the morning, we went for a sightseeing tour of Canberra, in the company of a local brother called Muhammad Kenyan. The brother, out of his kindness, took some time out of his schedule and showed us the city and surrounding regions. May Allah reward him and bless him and his family. *Āmīn*.

Canberra is a planned city, meaning it was planned out in its entirety before being built. It consists of many tree-lined boulevards, wide roads, lush green parklands, mountains, and nature reserves – resembling, to an extent, the city of Islamabad in Pakistan. Despite being a bit chilly, the sun was shining and the blue sky, with scattered clouds, above us

enhanced the experience. Brother Muhammad Kenyan took us to the National Arboretum where, from a hill-top, we enjoyed great views of forests, gardens and rivers. The area was created, and trees replanted, after it was burnt out due to the bushfires in 2003. Wildfires caused extensive damage to Canberra and its suburbs, where some 500 homes were destroyed and several people died. Standing on the hill-top, we could see the famous Black Mountain, across in the distance, and the Telstra Tower (a telecommunications tower) situated above it. We also visited the Westfield Shopping Centre where we purchased a few items and ate a delicious lunch, *Al-Hamdulillāh*.







Lecture at the Australian National University

We then made our way to the Australian National University (ANU) where my lecture on “Understanding Gender Roles in Islam” was organised at 12:30 pm by the university MSA. The attendees were less in number, probably because many of them were travelling or engaged in other activities. Nevertheless, those who did attend, listened attentively, as I discussed the role of men and women in marital relationships – in light of Islamic teachings. A question and answer session followed in which the students asked very pertinent questions. It is always a pleasure to meet university students and interact with them. We performed *Zuhr Ṣalāh* at the *musalla* located within the university campus.





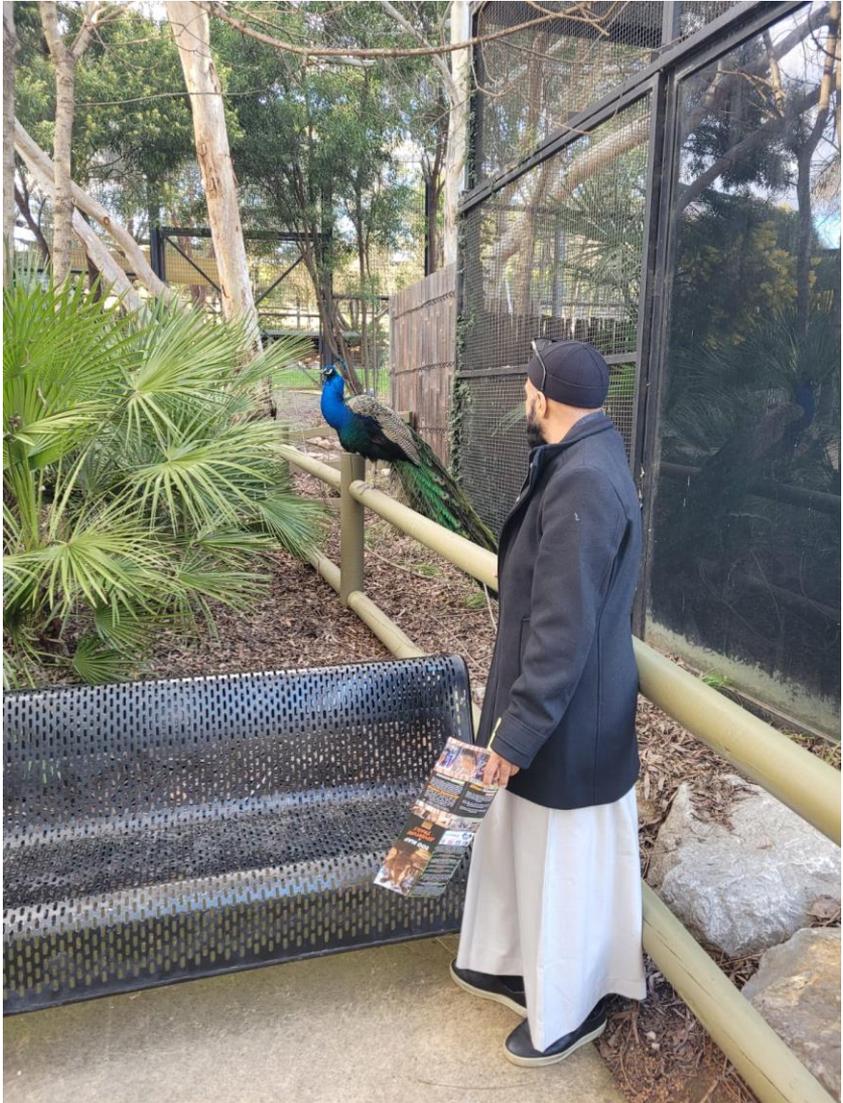
Canberra National Zoo & Aquarium

Prior to travelling to Australia, I was hoping to visit a zoo and witness the amazing creatures of the animal kingdom. This desire and wish was fulfilled on the final day, *Al-Hamdulillāh*. In the company of another kind brother, Taymur (who is of Pakistani heritage), we paid a visit to the National Zoo and Aquarium in Canberra. Due to it being a working day, the zoo was not very busy. We, therefore, managed to wonder around the entire zoo in just over two hours. From big cats – which include white lions, Bengal and Sumatran tigers, cheetahs, snow leopards, and bears – to giraffes, penguins and monkeys, the zoo features a variety of native and exotic animals. However, the highlight – for me – was seeing native Australian Koalas live, for the first time. They appeared beautiful, calm and peaceful. It seemed as though

the Koala was unfazed with all the surrounding noise and fuss, and just carried on minding its own business, either sleeping or slowly eating leaves. Koalas mainly eat eucalyptus leaves (gum leaves) and, occasionally, leaves of other native Australian trees. They can eat more than a pound of eucalyptus leaves a day. It was also a great experience being in close contact with Kangaroos and feeding them. Each and every creature of the animal kingdom is a manifestation of Allah's beautiful Creation and Design. He Most High says, *"This is the creation of Allah. Now, show me what is created by those others, besides Him. Rather, the transgressors are in open error"* (Qur'an 31: 11).











Farewell Dinner

As mentioned previously, I delivered a lecture on Tuesday evening at Gungahlin Mosque after *Ishā'* Prayers. Dinner was arranged (after the lecture) at a local restaurant. The imam of the mosque, Shaykh Hatim Sa'd, and other scholars such as Shaykh Muhammad Fawzi, and major individuals of the local community and mosque management were invited. It was a pleasure to spend some quality time in their company and discuss relevant matters. After dinner, I bid them all farewell and returned to the hotel for my final night in Australia.

Return to the UK

The following morning (**Wednesday 16th August, 2023**), around 10 am, we (Shaykh Mu'im of Melbourne and myself) departed Canberra and travelled via road to Sydney Airport. Shaykh Mu'im rented a car and hence he was the driver. The three-hour drive was very gratifying, scenic and enjoyable. Brunch was taken, along the way, at a cafeteria located in a remote and scenic region. We also purchased some pure and natural olive oil, extracted from the abundant of olive trees just outside the cafeteria. Australia is blessed with wholesome items such as pure honey and olive oil. I have previously expressed that instead of gifting customary unhealthy food items such as candy, chocolate, *ḥalwā*, *mitha'i/ḥalwiyāt*, we should consider gifting healthy items such as fruit, pure honey, pure olive oil, dates, and figs. It would help change habits and promote a healthy lifestyle.

We reached Sydney city centre around 1:30 pm. Since we had a bit of time, we parked up and walked around the Darling Harbour. When I visited Sydney at the beginning of my tour, I had not witnessed this part of Sydney. It was bright and sunny, and the walk along the harbour, next to the Sydney tower and other skyscrapers, was very enjoyable. Shaykh Mu'im asked me to record a short five-minute video, in relation to Allah's Beautiful Names. Shaykh Mu'im teaches a weekly course, and he suggested that I have a short lesson recorded which would be played for the students. Thus, whilst sitting outdoors, on the edge of the harbour, I

highlighted the importance of understanding Allah's beautiful names.







We performed *Zuhr* and headed towards Sydney Airport, for my long flight back to the UK. I bid Shaykh Mu'im farewell and thanked him for his wonderful hospitality. Once again, my return journey consisted of three legs. I first flew at 5:30 pm on the local flight to Melbourne. After a layover of two and a half hours, I departed Melbourne at 8 pm on Etihad Airways and, after a fourteen-hour flight, landed in Abu Dhabi at 5 am the next morning. Thereafter, at 8 am, I flew on the third leg of my journey and landed at London Heathrow airport at 1 pm local time on Thursday 17th August, 2023, *Al-Hamdulillāh*.

I returned home safely after an eight-day visit to Australia. My thanks, once again, to my hosts, Shaykh Mawlana Mu'im and Zuhd Guidance, and all the wonderful people I met during the visit. I was truly touched by their good manners and beautiful character. A sign of a good trip is when you have withdrawal symptoms after you return! May Allah bless them all, and hopefully I can visit again. *Āmīn*.

Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari

Darul Iftaa, Leicester, UK

03/11/2023