Dr. Tauseef Ahmad Khan



Can you tell us about yourself? What do you do and what is your area of research?

I am a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Toronto. I research the effect of foods on health especially sweeteners like honey. This area is called Nutritional Epidemiology and in general is a very hot topic because everyone has an opinion on foods we eat. Even small studies get traction in the media which exaggerates its results. All said, the results of research on food and health have been found to be very inconsistent, and people (and scientists also) are emotionally attached to their views (e.g. vegetarian diet or ketogenic diet is best, sugars are a poison, fats are unhealthy etc.). The controversies on which food is healthy or not keep the field buzzing with discussion and activity. However, the major reason why I am excited to be in this field is that the Holy Qur'an has given such clear guidance in this field and so we, Ahmadi scientists, can offer new insights on the relation of food and health hitherto unknown.

Why (and when) did you decide to pursue a career in research? Were there any examples that inspired you?

After completing my medical degree from the Aga Khan University, I went to UK for further residency. Due to health reasons, I could not continue my clinical training and I went to meet Huzoor Aqdas[aa] for guidance, who told me to go into the field of research.

Afterwards, door after door opened for me, all due to the personal connection with Huzoor[aa] who guided me on every step. I was not special in any way, instead I noticed that Huzoor[aa] took a personal interest in all Ahmadis who pursued a career in research. After doing an MSc in Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, I received a full scholarship for my Ph.D. — the only foreign student to obtain one of the two scholarships available. It was just Huzoor's[aa] prayers and the blessing of serving in Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya.

When Huzoor[aa] expressed his wish that Ahmadis should go into research about honey, I expressed my wish to go into this field. I also tried to switch my field from genetic epidemiology to nutritional epidemiology. I was warned by my supervisors that it would be futile and such a subject change at this point in the career is not possible especially as I don't have a background in nutrition. In a Mulāqāt, Huzoor[aa] told me that Canada is the place for research on honey. A few years later, I was in Canada and obtained a position as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Toronto without even formally applying for the position.

What I learned from this is that if we follow the path that Khalīfatul-Masih[aa] guides us upon, no matter what our struggles, the paths of success will be opened for us—as all success lies in obedience to Khilafat. Of course, I everyone struggles, and my situation was no different but eventually when things became easier for me, it reminded me that the Qur'an is true when it says: "Surely, there is ease, after hardship".

My inspiration is the Holy Qur'an which is full to the brim in guidance for scientists. My inspiration is Huzoor Anwar[aa] who has guided me on every step. My inspiration are the sayings of the Promised Messiah[as] and the Khulafā', which are also full of instructions and guidance on all areas of research sciences.

If someone is inspired by your example and wishes to pursue academic research, what advice do you have for them?

Our inspiration should be the fact that as Ahmadi Muslims, we have to become teachers of the world in all knowledge including sciences. We are not in any way less intelligent, knowledgeable or less hardworking than the others who are doing great science.

In fact, we can, and we shall, do greater science with the Holy Qur'an in our hands that claims: "We have not left out anything in the Book" and "This is [book is] a detailed exposition of all things". Thus, all guidance, all knowledge, and all areas of research are covered by the Holy Qur'an. We should remember that the Holy Qur'an is our only light, and it is our only guide. It is the bright star for our limited vision and it contains all the keys to the secrets of the scientific world. Thus, if we humble ourselves and consider ourselves weak and helpless, like a child abandoned in the wilderness — and pray to God to show us the straight path. Then, the light of the Holy Qur'an will shine forth upon us like the North Star, it will show us the path to follow and will open the very doors that are permanently closed to others.

The Holy Qur'an is not meant to make life difficult for us — instead it is here to make our life easier. It says: "We have not sent down the Qur'an to thee that thou shouldst be distressed." And as we ponder upon it, Allah will turn our research struggles into ease as it claims itself: "Allah will soon bring about ease after hardship." Remember, the Holy Qur'an alone will grant us eminence and honour, as the Promised Messiah[as] states: "Those who honour the Qur'an will be honoured in heaven."

So, read the Holy Qur'an, not for only twenty minutes after Fajr, but like a textbook—ponder over it, reflect upon it, ponder again, and reflect more. Read it in your spare time but also find time in your busy schedule to ponder over it — with deep contemplation and sincere intensity. Always keep a copy of the Holy Qur'an on you — which is now so easy with your mobile phones in which you can keep an app, ebook or text file of the Holy Qur'an. And keep a dictionary of the Holy Qur'an with you to expand the meanings of the difficult words (e.g. Lane's lexicons or Malik Ghulam Farid Ṣāḥib's dictionary). Love the Holy Qur'an like your dearest treasure that has the keys to all the difficult questions in your research field. Inspect the translation again and again, and ask for knowledge from God alone for He holds all the keys to the unseen: "To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth". Then you will be given the keys to unlock the secret doors that were closed since the time of Adam[as] and were meant to be opened in the time of the Promised Messiah[as].

Remember, research is hard and difficult. It requires hard work over a very long time, then you will be rewarded. So always be firm and confident in your success. Have a resolve like the mightiest wave in the ocean, have steadfastness like the highest peak in the mountains and believe in Allah's succour. An Ahmadi can never fail in his task if he works hard, has firm resolve and trust in Allah—"And sufficient is Allah as a Friend, and sufficient is Allah as a Helper." Follow the example of the Promised Messiah[as] in hard work and worship. He said: "My nature is not prone to failure. I have been bestowed such courage and fortitude as mountains cannot match."

Be mindful of your time. Research is about focused work and being efficient in using your time. Remove all vain distractions and be single-mindedly devoted towards your goal, and your every minute should be accounted for. The Promised Messiah[as] was promised by God that "Your time shall not be wasted".

Keep lofty goals. Don't waste your time with people with superficial goals and mundane thoughts. You should soar like an eagle with a vision that is always upon the heavens, and

don't mingle with those who wish to remain among the creatures of the earth. Try to be in the company of fellow scientists and scholars—Ahmadi and non-Ahmadi—as the Holy Qur'an says "Keep company with the righteous"—as these are people who are seeking the truth in how this world works. This company will encourage you to "vie, with one another in good works".

Send Durood (blessings) on the Holy Prophet[aa] as it is the way of shaking the heavens in order to receive the grace and blessings of Allah as pathways of light from the heart of this Beloved Prophet[sa]. Whenever you are stuck in your research, humble yourself at the threshold of God in your prayers and also start sending Durood on His beloved Prophet[sa]. Then you will see so many blessings and see first-hand the succour of Allah descending. Firmly believe that the immaculate Prophet[sa] is the greatest teacher that brought us the Holy Qur'an and brought us the most perfect prayer of all in the form of Ṣūrah Fātihah, which says "Guide us in the right path". This path is our light and this Prophet[sa] is our teacher. So, love this Prophet[sa] and send blessings upon him so that Allah will love you and bless you — "Allah and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. O ye who believe! you should *also* invoke blessings on him and salute *him* with the salutation of peace"

Ponder over Ṣūrah Fātihah. It is the key to the Holy Qur'an. Read the commentary of this book as described by the Promised Messiah[as] and you will understand that it contains the fundamental truths of the nature of this world. It is the lightning that illuminates the other verses of the Holy Qur'an. It is the key that unlocks the door of the insights of the Holy Qur'an. It purifies and becomes a glove for your hand with which you can now touch the closed book (Kitāb Maknūn) and behold, this book opens up for you (Kitāb Mubīn). If you humbly ponder over the Holy Qur'an in the light of Ṣūrah Fātihah with ardour, passion, and focus, then this light will illuminate your heart and expand your mind. You will read a research paper and suddenly the fundamental ideas will be explained to you, and you will recall and connect the verses of the Holy Qur'an that give principles of the field you are reading. You will be able to find the flaws in the paper's logic and suggest better research directions. You will recall ideas that would appear to be on another level, you will feel like you are soaring in the sky like a bird floating upon the up-winds of the Holy Qur'an. Your mind will expand, and your intellect will grow. As you read the Holy Qur'an again and again, everything in your area of research that you inquire about will be explained to you — "And We have sent down to thee the Book to explain everything."

Therefore, in summary, my advice is this: the Holy Qur'an is an ocean so deep that has no end, and it explains the natural world whose secrets never end. The Holy Qur'an, the word of God, acts as a mirror to the natural world which is the work of God. Therefore, the more you ponder over the Holy Qur'an, the more the secrets of the world will be opened for you. You will realise that nothing is impossible, only difficult, but these difficulties are also made easy by the Holy Qur'an. The only impossible things are that which are declared impossible by the Holy Qur'an— everything else is possible. There is no direction that you cannot progress towards and there is no discovery that you cannot make.

You might wonder, why do people who do not believe in God and do not follow the Holy Qur'an succeed and are great scientists? The Holy Qur'an declares that there are two requirements for progress in a field: hard work and trust in Allah (see Qur'an 26:81). These people are doing only the former (hard work) and have left the latter (trust in Allah). However, when they do their work, they work harder than anyone else. Their extreme hard work is rewarded to a certain extent — a bicycle with one wheel will still move albeit with great difficulty, very slowly, and will most likely cause severe injury. A believer, if he works hard and also puts his full trust in Allah, then has the full capacity to progress — a bicycle with two wheels will be so much faster than a broken one. These scientists who are successful, work on average 12 hours a day almost 7 days a week — how can we succeed if we consider a 6- hour work day as a good day. We must work harder; if they work 12 hours, we should put in 13-14 hours each day and continue so for weeks, months and years

on-end and alongside we must also put our trust in Allah and beseech Him for help. Then Allah will have mercy upon us and open the doors of success for us. Those who wish to live an easy life and are not prepared to put in the hard work that is required, are not suited for research. I have yet to see a great scientist who did not toil to the utmost and did not make day-and-night the same in his or her pursuit of discovery. When you are able to do it, then you are ready for the field of research — but don't worry this toil is rewarded and the pleasure of discovering the truth in nature is immensely satisfying. On top, our research work actually becomes the worship of God.

When you work in any research field for some time and you ponder over the Holy Qur'an you will realise that without the Holy Qur'an, the vision of these people is shallow, their goals are limited, and they waste much funds in pursuits that lead to dead-ends. Without the light of the Qur'an, their ship is marooned in the high seas at night with no light and no direction. They are blind and cannot see. Sometimes a wave throws a fish onboard that they eat but they are in constant danger of destruction from rocks jutting from the surface, which they cannot see. They grope in the darkness, sometimes they catch a flying bird and at other times have their hands bitten off by beasts of the ocean. This is the state of research of those who do not seek guidance from God.

The believer, on the other hand, rides the calm and clear ocean illumined by a lighthouse of the Holy Qur'an. Wherever he casts his net, he catches plentiful fish — and no action is wasted. Every step he takes is considered worship and the fulfillment of the commandment of God: "ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth".

Currently, the majority of research, which is not illumined by the light of the Holy Qur'an has shallow goals and much money is wasted as the majority of the research is not based upon any fundamental truths. In the past several decades as scientists have drifted away from God, the major discoveries are becoming harder and harder to obtain. Some scientists are even calling it the 'end of science'. This is because they have no rope to which they can hold on to in the storm for they have abandoned the "Good tree whose root is firm and every one of whose branches reaches into heaven. And it brings forth fresh fruit at all times by the command of its Lord". While some progress is witnessed, no doubt, as God bestows His Mercy and Grace upon everyone who seeks the truth, even if they don't believe in Him. Without a belief in God, this progress is made slow and difficult with many missteps. If we follow the Holy Qur'an, even if we are behind, Allah will pick us up like a child and take us to the peak of our destination. Believing that without the Holy Qur'an we can become great scientists and become a nation that will dominate the world in both spiritual and worldly progress is a folly. Allah has tied ALL OF OUR success to the Holy Qur'an, the more we embrace it, the more it will elevate us. The Holy Qur'an is our only means of success, it is the only boat that will carry us to our destination — without it, we will drown in the deep ocean and no one will save us. That is what I have learned and what I believe.

I recommend to my young Khuddam; if you wish to embark upon research, read the Holy Qur'an like a book that needs to be understood. Read it day-and-night with translation. Don't wait for a Murrabi to explain it to you. Ask Allah for the explanation as it is His book and the Rahman has taken upon Himself to teach you (see 55:2-3). Consider it the *best* thing that has been given to you as all goodness is contained in it.

In addition to studying the Holy Qur'an with deep contemplation, also read the commentary of Ṣūrah Fātihah, the Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam, Barāḥīn Ahmadiyya, Kashtī Nūḥ, Barakātud Duā' and Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth. I will also recommend you to read Lecture Lahore, Lecture Sialkot, Lecture Ludhiana and the Essence of Islam. All this reading will give you the fundamentals of Islam and our purpose on this earth. In addition, these discourses will open the Holy Qur'an for you. You must also read research papers, books about science — read everything you can lay your hands on — but with the firm belief that this knowledge is utterly useless unless seen through the light of the Holy Qur'an. In fact, if you see, you will

realise that all knowledge actually stems from the Holy Qur'an — there is nothing outside.

I finish by repeating what the Promised Messiah[as] and the Khulafā' have been telling us, that if we keep the Holy Qur'an as a guide, great new discoveries in science will become the norm rather than an exception. The progress will be so immense that the current era will seem like an ant climbing a mole hill and when enough Ahmadi scientists follow the Holy Qur'an, the day will soon dawn, which as described by the Holy Qur'an will be "a spectacle of bliss and a vast kingdom." InshaAllah.

One final thing I wish to advise upon and in which I see many university students struggling, is their weak writing ability. I don't know the exact reason for this, perhaps they spend more time on mobile phones sending short messages and have little practice of long-form writing! An Ahmadi student who wishes to pursue research should try to develop excellent writing skills because a good scientist is also a professional writer. A good scientists' writing is precise, clear and concise. A superior writing ability would be most valuable when applying for grants and communicating research ideas in research papers. I have seen very good scientists struggle to compete in this most competitive field, only because their writing ability was poor. I have also seen students rejected from research programs only because their writing was below par. As students, you should put special emphasis on improving your English writing, as English is the medium of scientific communication. You can do this by giving special attention to your work in English classes, learn from your essay assignments, read widely, and if possible take English as a course in undergraduate studies e.g. English literature or English language — you will find these very valuable later on. You can also improve your writing skills by writing letters and opinion pieces for newspapers under MASQ, and writing more articles for Jamā'at magazines like the An-Nidā', the Ahmadiyya Gazette, the Review of Religions and Al-Ḥakam. You can ask scholars in the Jamā'at to review your writing but you should also consult good English grammar and writing books regularly. Remember, the Promised Messiah[as] came to give us the pen to defend Islam. You must practice to use this pen. Be warned, writing will be a struggle at first but it will improve and become easier with practice. And if you struggle enough, a day will dawn when writing will become as easy as breathing for you. Overcoming struggle is the only path to success as Allah states in the Holy Qur'an: "Surely there is ease after hardship. Aye, surely there is ease after hardship."