

## To Where the Sun Does Not Set

### Chasing the Midnight Sun in Northern Norway, July 2012

With Norway's proximity to the United Kingdom, I have had the opportunity to travel there several times to deliver talks, hold seminars, and catch up with old friends. The capital Oslo is where I generally visit; in 2017, I also visited Bergen, the country's second-largest city and located on the West Coast of the country. Of the country's approximately 182,000 Muslims, many reside mainly in Oslo and the surrounding cities of Lørenskog, Lillestrøm, and Jessheim, but there is also a sizeable community in Drammen, Bergen, Kristiansand, Trondheim, Stavanger, Sandnes, and Tromsø (in the north). The Muslims are of many ethnicities, including Pakistani, Somali, Afghani, Turkish, Kurdish, Kosovan, Moroccan and other Arab groups; there are also local reverts. The Pakistani community appears to be the largest community, running most of the country's *masjids*, followed by the Moroccan community. There are hardly any Gujaratis or other Indian Muslims in the country. In and around Oslo, the area with a very large concentration of Muslims is Holmlia. It has a very active *masjid* and the two Imams of the *masjid*, Mawlana Asim (Pakistani) and Mawlana Moussawi (Moroccan), are graduates of Jaamia Talimul Islam (Institute of Islamic Education) at the Markaz, Dewsbury. Many of the scholars there are graduates of either this Madrasa or from one in Pakistan.

Migrations from Pakistan started around the very late sixties. Among the countries of Europe and Scandinavia I have visited, I find the most comfortably settled Muslim community outside of the UK in Norway. The Muslims there are relatively well off and have maintained their ethnic cultures alongside being proud of their Norwegian identity (or Norsk, as they say). However, just like in other European countries, they face Islamophobia and discrimination. Muslim women, especially those wearing *hijab* or *niqab*, can struggle to secure jobs. Since the cost of living is very high, many women are compelled to work outside the home. Women who have immigrated to Norway on spousal visas must demonstrate that they hold a job and earn a certain salary in acquiring permanent citizenship. This is quite challenging for some families. There have also been two far-right Islamophobic terrorist attacks, both from individuals born in the same western part of Oslo. One was Anders Behring Breivik who killed 77 people in July 2011. The second was Philip Manshaus, a young man who opened fire at the al-Noor Islamic Centre in Baerum, west of the capital in August 2019. *Alhamdulillah*, nobody was hurt during this attack, and Manshaus was overpowered by two uncles from the mosque (one of them, apparently an ex-Pakistani army person) before the police arrived.

### My First Visit to Norway in 2010

My first visit to Oslo was in 2010 with Shaykh Ahmad Ali from Bradford for a program at Oslo University. It was a memorable program because it was our first introduction to the Norwegian Muslim community. The weather was cold but the Norwegian homes were well equipped to deal with this. Qamar Ali (may Allah bless him) was very active in the *da'wa* work at the time and had organised the program.

## Second Visit for Conference in 2012

The second visit in 2012 was for a much larger conference organised by Qamar Ali and his new team of young volunteers called Al Hidayah, which included Sufyan, Dunya, Farah and Maham. Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari and Shaykh Zahir Mahmood were also invited from the UK, along with at least five Norwegian scholars, Mawlana Tahsin Abo Baria, Abdul Wahid Aslam, Qamarul Haq, and the two Imams of Holmlia Masjid. It was a successful program attended by about 150 people, despite a change of venue on the last day. My topic was titled “From Words to Action” about Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal for the final talk on Saturday at 7.15 pm, and “Free Speech” for the first talk on Sunday, and “Understanding the Concept of *Amr bi 'l-Ma'ruf and Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (Enjoining Right and Forbidding Evil)” for the final talk on Sunday.

Sufyan, who had only recently started practicing and become involved with Al Hidayah, had generously opened his house for the foreign guests to stay in. He was not married at the time and his mother was out of the country, but he and his brother catered very well for guests. May Allah reward them. One of the memorable points about this visit were the several informal meetings with the local scholars held at Sufyan's house. Since there has been some difficulty in Norway of acquiring proper hand-slaughtered and non-stunned chicken, some of the local Ulama such as Mawlana Tehsin became very concerned. Regulations in Norway require all poultry to be stunned using a gas method prior to slaughter. This method carries the risk of the chickens prematurely dying before they can be slaughtered by hand. On the other hand, there is greater likelihood of them remaining alive if they are slaughtered by mechanical blade, due to the swiftness of the process. However, many scholars do not approve of this method of slaughter. This has created difficulty for many people who want an absolute pure and halal option. *Alhamdulillah*, due to the efforts of the early Muslim scholars and religious community in the UK, we are fortunate to have a satisfactory and well-regulated process and supply system here. Unfortunately, this is still quite a challenge in much of mainland Europe and in the Nordic countries.

The conference ended in the evening of Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012. Shaykh Zahir and the other local scholars departed either the same evening or early Monday morning. Mufti Muhammad and I stayed on as we had arranged a tour of Northern Norway with Qamar Ali.

## Northern Norway and the Midnight Sun

Northern Norway is above the Arctic Circle and is the land of the “midnight sun” and the northern lights. Right at the northern tip of Northern Norway is the North Cape (Nordkapp), which is the northernmost point in Europe that can be accessed by car. There is a 307-metre-high cliff (1,007 ft) there from where people can watch the midnight sun and gaze out at the Barents Sea to the north.

The midnight sun refers to when the sun dips but does not set and disappear below the horizon. It is only found in latitudes above that of the Arctic Circle, which is 66 degrees, 33 minutes and 44 seconds latitude. While the Earth does indeed rotate once every twenty-four hours, our beautiful planet is tilted by approximately 23.5°, leaving a small area at the top and the bottom that gets six months of day (from April to late August) followed by six months of night. This

means that the sun only rises and sets once each year at those two extreme points, and more so as you move away from them. This also means that above the 66° latitude, the further north you go the more nights of perpetual midnight sun you experience during the summer. The opposite is also true for other parts of the year; the sun does not rise for so many days. The northernmost parts of Canada, Greenland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Alaska, and Iceland are part of the arctic circle. Here is a list of how long the midnight sun shines in a few different areas of Norway:

- Sandnessjøen: 12<sup>th</sup> of June – 30<sup>th</sup> of June
- Tromsø: 18<sup>th</sup> of May – 25<sup>th</sup> of July
- Alta: 17<sup>th</sup> of May – 26<sup>th</sup> of July
- Vardø: 15<sup>th</sup> of May – 27<sup>th</sup> of July
- Hammerfest: 14<sup>th</sup> of May – 29<sup>th</sup> of July
- Berlevåg: 13<sup>th</sup> of May – 29<sup>th</sup> of July
- Nordkapp: 12<sup>th</sup> of May – 31<sup>st</sup> of July
- Longyearbyen/Svalbard: 19<sup>th</sup> of April – 24<sup>th</sup> of August

### ‘Isha’ and Fajr in Areas above 48.50° with Persistent Twilight (*Bilad Bulghar*)

During our studies of Islamic juridical texts, we had come across discussion about areas of the world where the above phenomena occurs and about the ruling of prayers therein. In later juridical texts, there is a reference to *Bilad Bulghar*, or “the lands of Bolghar,” an area where the time for ‘Isha’ prayer did not formally enter, and thus caused confusions about the beginning of Fajr time as well. The twilight (*shafaq*) in that area remains continuously after sunset until sunrise, as the sun never dips below 18° of the horizon. This is important as ‘Isha’ time only formally enters when the white twilight (or at least the red twilight) after sunset disappears completely. Twilight is produced by sunlight scattering in the upper atmosphere, after the sun has set (or before it rises in the morning), so the earth's surface does not become completely dark. The lower the sun is beneath the horizon, the dimmer the twilight is, and it only disappears when the sun reaches 18° below the horizon to become night-time. Then when the sun rises again to 18° below the horizon before sunrise, night-time becomes morning twilight, which is also called true dawn (*subh sadiq*).

The issue is that at latitudes greater than 48.5° (48°30’) north or south, twilight lasts from sunset to sunrise for many days, since the sun does not dip more than 18° below the horizon, and complete darkness does not occur even at solar midnight. In the northern hemisphere, this affects a number of places where Muslims now reside: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Belgium, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, and Ukraine. For instance, in London, the twilight does not dissipate for the whole night from around 22<sup>nd</sup> May to 20<sup>th</sup> July each year (for approximately two months), and the further north you travel in the UK, the more days there are with perpetual twilight over summer.

Muslims of the earlier centuries did not live in such high latitude areas, so the issue was not addressed in standard juridical texts. However, when the inhabitants of Bolghar became Muslim in 922 CE, it became necessary to resolve. Bolghar is on the bank of the Volga River in the present-day Tataristan republic of Russia. It is about 81 miles (130 km) from its capital Kazan and—similar to the UK—located at about 55° latitude. Some have reported that historically Bolghar was at the lower latitude of 49.5°. From this has come the proverbial term *Bilad Bulghar*, sometimes used to refer to all such higher altitude areas where the time of ‘Isha’ (and Witr) are not clearly determinable due to perpetual twilight.

A number of opinions are found regarding the time for ‘Isha’ in Bolghar and all such places above 48.5° latitude. One extreme opinion is that since the time (which is considered the apparent cause for prayer) does not enter, the *salat* is not obligated at all. Another opinion is that ‘Isha’ would have to be performed as a make-up (*qada’*) prayer, after Fajr time enters, since its time was not found. However, many hold the more pragmatic view that *salat* would have to be performed according to artificially determined times in these places.<sup>1</sup> This is based on a hadith regarding the emergence of Dajjal toward the end of times, when the days will be abnormally long, such that a day will be a year long, another a month long, and another a week long. The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) advised that an estimation be made for the prayer times rather than only praying five times in total for each of those lengthy days (see *Sahih Muslim*, 7015).

But how do we estimate these times? The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) did not provide any specific method for this, possibly to allow flexibility and leave it to what people felt best for each geographic area. There are at least three opinions on this:

1. Base the timings on the closest place with proper timings (*aqrab al-bilad*).
2. Use the last known proper timings from the same area (*aqrab al-ayyam*).
3. Use solar midnight for Fajr. This occurs at the point when the sun moves from the western hemisphere to the eastern hemisphere. ‘Isha’ time would thus end at exactly half the time between sunset and sunrise, from which Fajr time begins (*nisf al-layl*). Those who follow this view set ‘Isha’ time to begin between 60 to 100 minutes after sunset based on various criteria. Maghrib should therefore be performed before this artificial time of ‘Isha’.

Many in the UK have followed the second opinion, but the third opinion of solar midnight (*nisf al-layl*) for Fajr is growing in acceptance. The reason for this is that according to the definitions of true dawn (*subh, fajr*) provided by jurists, astronomers, and other experts, it is the rise and

---

<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth study of the views surrounding this issue, see ‘Allama Shihab al-Din, Harun ibn Baha’ al-Din al-Marjani, *Nazurat al-Haq fi Fardiyyat al-‘Isha’ wa in lam Yaghib al-Safaq*, Amman: Dar al-Fath, 2012, who strongly rejects the idea of *salat* not being obligatory in such places, and emphasises the importance of setting a time for ‘Isha’. See also Mufti Taqi Usmani, *Dunyā Mere Age*, Karachi: Maktaba Ma‘arif al-Qur’an, 2002, pp. 289–293, 309–313.

spread of twilight. This occurs even during persistent twilight and is an astronomical fact. Twilight can only belong to sunset (Maghrib) or dawn (Fajr) as it is purely the non-direct glow of the sun. It just follows the sun and is simply a consequence of its setting or rising. The twilight associated with the sun setting is always in the west, and the twilight associated with the sun rising is always in the east. So when it is darkening in its initial phase it belongs to sunset, and when it starts to brighten after half the night has passed it belongs to dawn. Fajr therefore has a real beginning time and there is no need to set an artificial time for it. It is only necessary to set an artificial time for 'Isha'.

### Prayer Times When the Sun Does Not Set in Lands Beyond 66° Latitude

As Muslims started inhabiting areas even further north beyond 66° latitude and into the Arctic Circle, where the sun itself does not set for days, the discussion moved on to determining all five prayer times in these areas. This is due to the perpetual sunlight during summer or perpetual darkness during winter.

According to those who said prayers should not be obligated at all due to the absence of their causes, the five prayers would only be obligated once during the perpetually light or dark months. The other more practical view calls for an estimation of all five prayer times within each twenty-four-hour period. Mufti Taqi Usmani, after his visit to Northern Norway in 2001, showed that in such places the times for Zuhr and 'Asr do indeed enter; since the sun at noon everyday is at a certain point, its subsequent shift from this meridian signals when Zuhr time enters. According to Imam Abu Hanifa, when the shadow of any object becomes double the size it was at noon, not including the residual shadow at noon, 'Asr time enters. According to the other Imams, it is when the shadow reaches the same size and not double. This is the normal way of determining prayer times for Zuhr and 'Asr anywhere, and it is possible to do this in these areas too (except for 'Asr during winter when the sun is below the horizon). Mufti Taqi went on to argue that it is incorrect to say that prayers are not obligated at all. The timings of Zuhr and 'Asr prayers can be determined through observation and Maghrib, 'Isha' and Fajr through one of the estimation methods when their times do not enter.

For this estimation, there are two proposals. One is that the times should be estimated according to the closest areas that have perfectly normal times, such as those at 45° latitude. Mufti Taqi says this is the stronger and more precautionous view. Countries at 45° latitude closest to Norway are probably southern France, northern Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. The other view is that they should be estimated according to the closest town where most of the times are found, such as Oslo. According to Mufti Taqi, this is also an acceptable view.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, the view that prayers are not obligated at all when their times are not observed is not one grounded in reality or on experience, and is certainly not in harmony with the spirit of our religion. How can one be satisfied with praying just five times during a two- or three-months

---

<sup>2</sup> See Mufti Taqi Usmani, *Dunyā Mere Age*, Maktaba Ma'arif al-Qur'an, 309-313.

period? Imagine the spiritual deprivation and turbulence this would cause. Prayer is spiritual fuel that we need to remember Allah and to nourish and rejuvenate the soul. Allah Most High says, “and perform the prayer for the remembrance of Me” (Taha, 20:14).

### Our Trip to See the Midnight Sun

Now to return to the account of our trip. When we heard that the midnight sun could be experienced in Northern Norway, we had organised with our host Qamar Ali to travel there for a few days and experience what it felt like to have continuous daylight for twenty-four hours. The North Cape is quite a distance away from Oslo. To provide some perspective, our flight from London to Oslo had taken nearly two-hours and covered a distance of 751 miles (1,208 km). We took a flight north for a similar distance in Norway itself from Oslo to Tromsø which is about 714.04 mi (1,149.14 km), and that also took about two hours. We then continued to drive even further north for at least ten hours to reach the northernmost part of Norway, the North Cape. The total distance from Oslo was 1,963.1 km. Here are the details of this journey.

### Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012

#### Monday Morning to Tromsø

We left at 7.30 am from Sufyan's house. The team travelling with myself and Mufti Muhammad was made up of Qamar Ali, Waqqas Zia, and my cousin Hafiz Asif Mangera from the UK, a solicitor and regular companion of mine on many international travels.

It took us approximately one hour to reach Oslo's main Gardermoen Airport where we boarded our SAS Scandinavian Airlines 4414 flight due to depart at 9.55 am. It was nearly a two-hour flight. Since we were tired, having slept late the previous night, I caught up on some sleep during the flight. I had only recently learned to make myself comfortable enough in flights to get some sleep, and, thank Allah, it has been an absolute blessing. An eye mask, ear plugs, a comfortable neck pillow and a window seat are also very helpful. We alighted in Tromsø at around 11.45 am and went pick up a rental car.

#### Monday Afternoon in Tromsø

Tromsø, which is 217 miles (350 km) north of the Arctic Circle at just below 70° latitude, has a population of 76,974 and is the third largest city north of the Arctic Circle anywhere in the world (following Murmansk and Norilsk). Since it is above 66° latitude, it has the annual midnight sun and polar night for a whole month depending on the season. There is a tiny town close by called Sommarøy, where the locals want to introduce a “time-free zone” during summer. During this juncture, there is daylight at all hours and people don't abide by the clock anyway.

Unfortunately, most of the rental companies were out of cars, but we finally managed to rent a Toyota Avensis from Avis for about 3,235 NOK (equivalent to about £345), which is quite expensive for a few days' of travel. I have found Norway and Denmark to be very expensive compared to the UK, and even to Sweden which lies in between the two Nordic countries. Many Norwegians and Danes cross over into Sweden to do their shopping, and find the UK very cheap for shopping, too.

We drove out of the car rental area and first went to look for a place to eat and a *masjid*. We found a supermarket, which happened to be owned by a Muslim (which was a good sign that there were Muslims nearby). A Sudanese brother Fadhil offered us some mango juice. He was very hospitable and took us to the *masjid* for Zuhr prayer. The *masjid* is called the Alnor Senter, Storgata 132, 9008 Tromsø (alnor.no). I made it a point to look at the timetable and take a picture of it. Since there is no sunset in Tromsø, we had been informed that some *masjids* follow the Oslo timetable, while others follow the timetable of Makkah, Saudi Arabia. As discussed earlier, the recommendation for these Arctic Circle areas is to follow the timetable of the closest place to them at 45° latitude. Makkah is at about 21° latitude, so much further away. This particular *masjid* followed the Makkah timetable, but we could not find a board member or administrator to ask why this was the case. Maybe they simply deferred to the timings of the most blessed city in the world when they could not determine a local timing.

We then decided to go to another supermarket from where we purchased some bread, brown cheese, tuna and drink to prepare sandwiches for lunch. When there are hardly any halal restaurants in proximity, the local supermarkets becomes your next best option.

One of the main tourist attractions of Tromsø is the Tromsø Bridge, which crosses the Tromsøysundet strait between Tromsdalen on the mainland and the island of Tromsøya. It is 1,036-metre-long (3,399 ft) and connects the two parts of the city together. We travelled over the bridge, which provides breath-taking views of the strait and beyond. Since our main destination was the North Cape, we did not have much time to explore town, so we departed onto the highway E8. From here it is about 500 km to Honningsvåg, which is the northernmost town close to the North Cape.

The initial drive was along the coast after which the navigation system directed us inland onto route Fv91. About 55 miles from Tromsø at Breidvik, we had to cross one of the silvery fjords, so we waited about forty-five minutes for the Svensby-Breivikeidet ferry and crossed to the other side. The cost of the ferry was 215 NOK (£21) and took about twenty minutes.

Norway is a beautiful country with abundant greenery and forests. Norway has an elongated shape, and has one of the longest and most rugged coastlines in the world. There are some 50,000 islands off its much-indented coastline. We crossed another fjord with the Olderdalen-Lyngseidet ferry for Olderdalen, which is still on route Fv91. We had to wait for about twenty minutes for this ferry and the cost was 280 NOK (£28). From Olderdalen, we took the E6 north along the coast, which stretches all the way to Olderfjord, where it becomes the E69.

On the way, we stopped at a few places to view the scenery and have lunch. Mufti Muhammad always sat in the middle of the back seat so he could get an unobstructed view of the road through the front window. He had brought along a copy of Mufti Taqi Usmani's travelogue of Northern Norway and would share some of it with us from time to time. At 7.45 pm we stopped at a supermarket again to buy some more bread, Norwegian brown cheese and coffee. Norwegian brown cheese, or brunost, in Norwegian, is a tan-coloured "whey cheese" with a distinctive caramel flavour. It is made with the whey rather than the curd so it has a malty sweetish taste. The water from the whey of milk is boiled down. This caramelises the sugars,

and after it is left to cool becomes brown cheese. It can be enjoyed in small amounts but can get a bit sickening if too much is eaten. The best thing to do is to not think of it as a cheese at all. Don't expect a cheddar or mozzarella taste, but expect a more a creamy, slightly sweetish taste. We survived on it throughout this trip.

Our companion Waqqas had purchased some Indian pickle (*achar*) from the first supermarket we had stopped at thinking we liked pickle for some reason. We would stand at the back of the hatchback car, and make sandwiches on the internal cover of the boot (trunk) with the tail gate open. On one occasion, to save time, the sandwiches were even made on the backseat of the car while we were driving. We had initially joked with Waqqas about his decision to buy the pickle, but added to the tuna and brown cheese, it proved to be a very balancing and palatable condiment after all.

The coffee at this second supermarket was complimentary. When I asked for a spoon to mix the sweetener, one of the customers remarked that Norwegians drink black coffee with a sugar cube in the mouth. I joked with him that they must be like Afghans who do the same with their green tea.

For much of the way, the sky had been overcast. *Alhamdulillah*, an hour later at about 8.15 pm, the clouds dissipated and the sky turned blue. The temperature was around 15° centigrade. However, by 8.35 pm the blue sky had disappeared again behind the clouds and the rain had resumed. Many mountain tops still had snow covering their caps, and in many areas snow was also visible on the sides of the road.

The scenery was varied. We were blessed with stunning views of the green country side, pastures with grazing cattle and sheep, large silvery fjords with their rippling waters glistening in the daylight, imposing snow-capped mountains testifying to the might of Allah, and the occasional herd of reindeer crossing the road making us wait patiently. Unfortunately, just like every other worldly thing, however beautiful, it can become repetitive and monotonous. The value and pleasure of all worldly objects eventually diminish and do not remain the same. It reminds me of the value many visitors to Makkah and Madinah give to Zamzam water while they are in the Holy Sanctuaries and where there is an abundance of it; it is sometimes even wasted and spilled. However, as soon as the pilgrim departs to the airport, the single bottle of Zamzam they carry with them increases in value with every mile away from the Blessed Cities.

For much of our journey, we pretty much had the roads to ourselves. Few cars would pass by us, mainly when we passed by small towns or villages. Norway must be commended for looking after its roads so well, even in these remote sparsely populated northern areas. Norway has a population of only 5.328 million, much less than the city of London, but is 33% larger than the entire UK by area.

## Monday Evening

Qamar Ali had been driving for 6.5 hours since 2.30 pm when we departed. The drive did not seem too stressful due to the absence of traffic, but he had to pay attention to the road. In contrast, the rest of us could take a nap if we wanted, but he still insisted on driving most of the



way. We made another stop to refuel at the small town of Alta, which is at 70° latitude. We were just over half way to North Cape now. Along the way, we had seen salmon farms, so when we stopped for fuel and saw some fresh salmon on display at the store, we thought we should try some. We purchased two small disposable barbeques so we could grill the salmon somewhere. The sky was blue again and everything became so much brighter all around us. The scenery looks so much better with the sun out.

Even though Norway is an oil producer, the cost of petrol there is the second highest in the world at about 14.70 NOK (£1.23) per litre at the time, and now about 17.71 NOK (£1.48). It is very different from some of the oil producing gulf countries. There is no glitz, skyscrapers or designer brands staring in your face wherever you go. In 1969, one of the world's largest offshore oilfields was discovered off Norway. Instead of becoming intoxicated with this newfound wealth, an investment fund was established in 1996 with expansion into global assets. The oil will run out one day, so the aim of the fund is to ensure that the money acquired is invested responsibly for the long-term. The fund is now the world's largest, owning almost 1.5 percent of all shares in the world's listed companies. This means that it has holdings in around 9,000 companies worldwide, including Apple, Nestle and Microsoft, entitling them to a small share of each country's profits each year for the conceivable future. The fund also owns hundreds of buildings in some of the world's leading cities, generating rental income.

Norway has a very high standard of living and is currently the sixth richest country in the world when measured by GDP per capita. As mentioned before, goods are expensive here. A bottle of drinking water, if that is anything to go by, costs an average of £1.50–£2.00, which is said to be the highest in the world.<sup>3</sup> I find the prices of many products to be at least 50% more than in the UK. Interestingly, Norway ranks second in having the best tap water in the world, so I am surprised why people still buy bottled water there—must be the convenience, a status thing, or the power of marketing.

Maghrib in Oslo was around 10.40 pm, so fifty minutes prior to that we stopped on the side of the road by a little stream to perform 'Asr. The water was very cold but Mufti Muhammad and I made *wudu*' with it. He was very excited by the scenery and all the new experiences this trip afforded us. He had visited Oslo a few times before and had waited a long time for this trip to materialise to explore the northern region. He had been instrumental in getting this trip organised. After praying we continued with our drive. The day had started to feel elongated now. Since we are not used to the sun still being up in the sky at this time of the day, we started to experience the difference. It felt slightly confusing, almost artificially long, as though we were making a mistake in the time and the clock was wrong. It was now 11.15 pm but bright outside, even though we could not see the sun because of the clouds.

We passed through a tunnel that was a mile or two long and different to any tunnel I had seen in the UK or USA. It was dimly lit and had large unfinished roughly-hewn stone sides and felt like

---

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country\\_price\\_rankings?itemId=13](https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country_price_rankings?itemId=13)

we were passing through a cave. Nearly all the tunnels we passed through in the north of the country were like this. There are many such tunnels in Norway (over 900), and some even contain roundabouts within. Norway is obsessed with tunnels. There is even a proposal for a submerged, floating tunnel about 100 metres below the water's surface.

I had taken over the driving from Qamar Ali after our last stop. After driving for some time, I realised that I had not overtaken any one and nor had anyone overtaken us; there were hardly any other cars on the road. As before, the roads were well maintained and it was a single carriageway with two-way traffic.

### Monday Night Maghrib Prayer Deep Below the Sea

*Alhamdulillah*, the weather started clearing up again after raining for the last two hours. We then entered the North Cape Tunnel, which is one of the longest and the northernmost of the subsea road tunnels in Norway. It is part of the route E69 highway that we were on and descends under the Magerøysundet strait between the Norwegian mainland and the large island of Magerøya. It is 4.272 miles (6.875 km) long and reaches a depth of 212 metres (696 ft) below sea level. After an initial descent it straightens out beneath the sea and then reascends. About two miles into the middle of the tunnel, I saw a recess area where I decided to stop for Maghrib prayer. When would we ever get a chance again to call the *adhan* and pray *salat* under the sea? There was an eery silence and not a car passed by while we were in the tunnel. It was dimly lit and the sides were unfinished roughly hewn rock like an underwater cavern. Mufti Muhammad did *wudu'* on the side from a bottle of water. I called the *adhan* and it echoed all around. It felt absolutely amazing and spiritually uplifting to call the Great Name of Allah from so deep down in the earth with the huge mass of Barents Sea above us. I have never enjoyed calling an *adhan* like this one. This is probably the closest we could get to comprehend what it may have felt for Prophet Yunus (Allah be pleased with him) to call Allah Most High using the powerful formula from inside the body of the whale deep down in the sea. A Prophetic Hadith promises that all who hear the *adhan* (including inanimate objects) will bear witness on the Day of Judgement. I pray that the stones in this tunnel and the sea water above will bear witness for me. We performed Maghrib prayer at approximately 12.05 just past midnight. It was cold but tolerable. When we emerged from the tunnel it was brighter now than when we had entered.

We then continued on through the shorter 2.75-mile (4.5km) Honningsvåg Tunnel, which goes through a large mountain, and is the northernmost public road tunnel in the world, to reach Honningsvåg at 12.20 am. This is one of the smallest cities in Norway, with a population of 2,484 and is situated at a bay on the south-eastern side of the large island of Magerøya, while North Cape is on the northern side of the island. It is the closest city to North Cape.

After this we started our ascent to the North Cape and drove through the clouds at about 200 meters altitude; the visibility was extremely poor. We felt our ears pop as we climbed higher. The air pressure outside the body changes as the altitude changes and creates a difference in pressure on the two sides of the eardrum, so that is why you feel the pressure and blockage in the ears and experience the popping. It was after midnight and many busses were passing by us on their return from the North Cape. We finally reached the North Cape at 12.50 am. We did not

bother driving all the way up the 307-metre-high cliff (1,007 ft) to the plateau as it was quite foggy. It would cost 160 KR (£16) per person and there were only ten minutes left to closing time at 1 am, so the ticket office attendant advised us not to go.

Unfortunately, because it was so cloudy, we were unable to see the sun clearly. However, the silhouette of the sun was visible, and despite it being well past midnight, it still felt very much like day time; it was not dark at all. To the right was the Barents Sea extending to Russia and to the left was the Norwegian Sea. *Alhamdulillah*, after visiting Cape Point at the southernmost tip of South Africa, Allah had given me a chance to visit the North Cape at Norway's northern tip.

### Monday 'Isha' Prayer Past Midnight in Broad Daylight

On our decent, we stopped to pray 'Isha' at 1.15 am at the side of the road on the mountain among the clouds. This was the strangest 'Isha' prayer I had performed. It felt surreal as though we were praying a late Fajr prayer just before the sun is about to rise and the sky becomes bright. I had to remind myself that I was performing the late-night prayer, even though it was daylight all around us. You can only tell what the time is by consulting your watch. There is no other way of telling what time of day it is by just looking around.

After this we started driving south back through all the tunnels to Lakselv to catch our return flight. Lakselv (meaning "Salmon Lake") is about 119 miles (191 km) from North Cape and a 2.45-hour drive. We stopped at a rest area to pray Fajr at 3.30 am. The sun had never set but now it was getting much brighter as it was nearly its usual time for rising from the east. After the prayer, we found a nice little area next to the coast where there were some caravans parked to one side. Here we lit the disposable barbeques and grilled the salmon we had purchased earlier at the supermarket.

After partaking of this natural Norwegian breakfast, we continued in the direction of Lakselv. The airport was still closed when we arrived so we waited in the car. It is a tiny airport similar to the size of a petrol station. Soon the security personnel and staff arrived. Only my cousin Hafiz Asif and I were going to catch the flight from here. Mufti Muhammad, Waqqas, and Qamar Ali saw us off and drove back down to Tromsø, where they spent another day before returning to Oslo.

### Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012

#### Return to the UK

It was our time to depart these remote areas on the top of the world. There were no direct flights from Lakselv to Oslo for the time we needed. So we took the Wideroe WF 683 flight at 7.08 am and reached Tromsø at 7.54 am. From here it was the SAS SK 4411 flight at 10.15 that got us into Oslo at 12.05 pm with plenty of time remaining for our return flight to London at 3.05 pm on SAS SK 809. *Alhamdulillah*, there were no delays or problems on any of the flights and we made it for our final flight on time and reached London at about 4.25 pm.

### Reflections on the Tour of Northern Norway

We had travelled in the car for about fifteen hours with just a few short breaks in between, and had been awake for nearly twenty-four hours with just a few short naps in the car. However, the

thrill of the trip, the experience of the abnormal daylight hours, the freshness of the unpolluted air around us, the positive ions in the environment, the natural scenery of mountains, fjords, rivers, streams, snow, and various animals kept us going. Qamar Ali filled us in with many details about Norway, its politics and society. Waqqas is a more reserved individual but he also took part in some discussions and had his own questions. Mufti Muhammad was on his case prompting him to speak and say something. Mufti Muhammad kept us engaged with his discussions and his excitement at the new sights and experiences. I thank Allah who took us to these remote lands to observe the wonders of His creation and Who allowed us to remember Him in such places. We had prayed deep under the sea, in the clouds high on the side of a mountain, and at the side of a natural lake. Allah Most High says about the earth, "That Day she shall convey her news" (Zalzala, 99:4). The hope is that these patches of earth will bear witness to our devotion, as deficient as it may have been.

It was apparently the English sea captain Richard Chancellor who in 1553 first named the area the North Cape. It has also been referred to as "the end of the world" and it certainly seemed like it. Our visit was during the summer months when it is the midnight sun season. During the winter months, visitors come to the same place to catch a glimpse of the colourful and fascinating Northern Lights during its perpetual nights and no sun. The weather then is much colder of course, closer to 0 degrees. Maybe Allah will take us back there or to one of the other places in the world to experience the Northern Lights.

### Subsequent Visits to Norway

Since the 2012 trip, I have visited Norway on several more occasions (once with my family) for various lectures and seminars. On these occasions, I have usually delivered the pre-Jumu'a talk, sermon and prayer at the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) close to the Oslo City Centre (Centrum). The regular Imam there is Mawlana Hamid Farooq, a pleasant individual originally from Pakistan. This has usually been followed by seminars or workshops on the Saturday and Sunday on various subjects. The large Masjid Attouaba in Oslo City Centre, which is run by the Moroccan community, has been very welcoming and had generously allowed Al Hidayah to use their facilities. During the most recent visit, a seminar on marriage was held at Det Islamske Forbundet, commonly referred to as the Rabita Mosque. These trips usually also include informal gatherings on Saturday evening at the house of Daniel Shaikh, an IT professional who has been my honourable and benevolent host for the last several visits. He invites a number of young people to his house, and I get to learn from their questions and try to provide them with answers and guidance to their issues.

### Visiting Bergen in March 2017

I visited the west coast city of Bergen once in March 2017. Ismail Alibhai accompanied me. The noteworthy point about this visit was that the hosts were two young brothers, Oneeb and Mohammed Anass Tanveer, one eighteen and the other twenty years old at the time, both studying medicine. Oneeb was the president of the Muslim Student Society in Bergen, which is a very active students society in spite of the town's small population. The two brothers managed the whole visit and organised the tickets, stay, and programs with the help of their student

association. They were very mature and their hospitality was excellent. I remember thinking at the time that their parents had raised the brothers and nurtured them well. How many young people does one find organising such programs and inviting scholars even from their own locality, let alone from another country? Their father who was visiting Pakistan returned while we were there, and we met him on our last day. It was a Sunday morning, and he accompanied us for some sightseeing of the town. The whole program had been the two brothers and their friends' initiative and their father had encouraged them to see it through. He was very proud of them for what they had accomplished. May Allah reward them abundantly, protect them, and grant them success in their endeavours.

There is a significant Pakistani Muslim community in Bergen. I had a lecture or two at the Bergen University, and then one or two lectures at the masjid, with one exclusively for the sisters. The dominant theme of the talks was the importance of sacred knowledge (*'ilm*), the practical ways to enhance one's learning, and the dangers of ignorance and unawareness of one's religion. My normal experience with Norwegian Muslims is that they don't ask too many questions after lectures, even when given the opportunity. However, on this occasion, I received a number of written questions especially from the sisters. Many of the questions were regarding fundamental issues of faith and the rights and role of women in Islam. Apparently, based on what was explained to me, teachers in Norway schools challenge faith-based ideology quite a bit and ask many questions. I tried to answer as many of their questions as possible in the time we had. May Allah accept the programs and assist the community in maintaining and enhancing their faith.

We could not tell that Bergen is the second-largest city in Norway, since it has the vibe of a small town and was not very busy at all. There were many narrow cobblestone alleys, with houses and other buildings clinging to the hillsides that surround the city. We visited the picturesque wharf that has several old, wooden buildings painted in different colours. There are some remnants from the time Bergen used to be the centre of trade between Norway and the rest of Europe. We then visited the very lively and renowned Fish Market that has been providing freshly caught sea food since 1276. There was every type of sea food there, which was interesting to see, as I only eat fish, not even prawns. The town has a unique character and felt different compared to any other place I had visited.

We then took the Fløibanen, which is a funicular railway, to the summit of Mount Fløyen. The summit is 320 metres above sea level and it is a six-minute ride to the top. The two carriages of the train have transported people to the mountain for over 100 years, carrying over one million passengers each year. At the top we got a spectacular panoramic view of the city, fjord and mountains. There was still snow at the top so we had to be careful, but the sun was out and the ride up was certainly a worthwhile experience.

Allah has created so many beautiful places in the world, and having visited so many, it is very difficult to say which is the best; they all have their unique features that are a testimony to Allah's infinite beauty, greatness, power, and marvellous design. "Blessed is Allah, the best of creators" (Mu'minun, 23:14).