

Tribute to Barrie Schwartz: A Beacon of Knowledge and Friendship

Arif Khan

It is a rare gift to come across someone whose passion and dedication extend far beyond their field of expertise and into the hearts of those they encounter. Barrie Schwartz was one such individual; a man who became not only a leading expert on the Shroud of Turin, but also a cherished friend, and beloved figure for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

A Humble Beginning at the Jalsa Salana

For over 50 years, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has hosted its annual convention, the Jalsa Salana, gathering tens of thousands of people from all corners of the world. It's a vibrant event, filled with spiritual reflection, learning, and unity. In 2015, when the **Review of Religions**, the community's comparative religion magazine, wanted to create a Shroud of Turin exhibition, the natural question arose: could we invite **Barrie Schwartz**, the world-renowned expert on the Shroud?

The thought of reaching out to someone so celebrated was daunting, but Barrie immediately embraced the idea with open arms. In fact, he jumped into planning with us, bringing along Pam Moon, another expert. His humility and warmth were evident from the start. Pam brought along her excellent exhibition boards, along with a life-size replica of the Shroud, but it was Barrie's personality that really made the whole experience unforgettable.

A memory that stands out vividly from me from that first Jalsa involves an unexpected road closure on the **A3 motorway**. The traffic had come to a complete standstill for over 30 minutes, but Barrie, ever the extrovert, got out of the car and began chatting with strangers, turning a frustrating situation into an opportunity for connection. It was a perfect encapsulation of his personality: he adapted to the situation he found himself in, made the most of it, and instantly connected with people he'd never met before.

That first year of the Shroud exhibition at the Jalsa, we didn't know how the exhibition would be received or whether anyone would even attend. But with Barrie's presence and the backing of the Khalifa, His Holiness, who urged people to see the replica of the Shroud, we were astonished by the number of visitors. This was just the beginning of Barrie's enduring relationship with our community.

Growing the Network

Over the years, Barrie not only contributed his own deep expertise but introduced us to other eminent scholars. Through him, we connected with individuals like **Emanuela Marinelli**, **Bruno Barberis**, and **David Rolfe**, enriching our understanding of the Shroud from multiple angles.

Barrie, always with his quick wit, once quoted the famous line from Jaws: "*We're going to need a bigger tent!*" His humour, paired with his knowledge, made him a feature of the exhibition, and soon our modest exhibition began to grow, drawing larger and larger crowds.



From left: Barrie Schwartz, Bruno Barberis, Amer Safir, Emanuela Marinelli, Arif Khan

An Unprecedented Honour

Barrie's commitment to the Jalsa Salana grew to the point where he and Pam Moon were made official organisers, proudly wearing their badges. This wasn't an ordinary distinction. His Holiness instructed us that Barrie and Pam be promoted to Naib Nazim, or deputy heads, of the Review of Religions team. To my knowledge, no non-community members had ever been given such a high honour at the event.

It was a testament to how deeply Barrie had become ingrained in our community, not just as a scholar, but as a brother, a mentor, and a friend.

A Moment of Reflection

The Jalsa provides an opportunity for a small number of leaders from other faith groups, communities, charities and politicians to speak on the stage and address the gathering. Barrie had a chance to do this in 2015, his first year. He later described this to me as 'the best speech I have ever given', after admitting he went up to speak with no written notes. During his speech, he reflected on his time with us and said, "My role was to come here and to share with you my knowledge of the Shroud of Turin, but I have to admit that in the three days I have been here, I have learned far more from you than you will ever learn from me."

He went on to state the following:

“As I stand here and look at your motto, [‘Love for all, Hatred for None’], I can only look at myself as a shining example of your creed, that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community would invite a Jewish man, to talk about a Christian relic, at a Muslim organisation.”

This heartfelt message resonated with everyone present and even made its way into one of **David Rolfe’s** films on the Shroud. From that point onward, for the next five years, Barrie could hardly walk ten steps at the Jalsa without someone stopping him for a chat, a question, or just to express their appreciation.

Champion of Open Discourse

One of Barrie’s greatest strengths was his commitment to open discourse and the respectful exchange of differing viewpoints. He never shied away from giving space to others, even those who disagreed with him, such as **Hugh Farey**, whose ideas often diverged from mainstream thinking on the Shroud.

Barrie had an unshakable belief in the rigours of scientific proof. I often winced when people of all backgrounds would approach him with bizarre or misinformed questions about the Shroud, but Barrie never flinched. He listened attentively and always responded with grace, delivering his answers with the depth and patience of a true teacher.

My Daughters’ American Uncle

My bond with Barrie wasn’t just professional—it was deeply personal. Over the years, he became like family to us. He would joke that my two daughters probably saw him as their ‘crazy American uncle’ who visited once a year. We shared countless meals together, both before and after the Jalsa, and those small, intimate moments of laughter and conversation are ones I will always cherish.



One year, when I picked Barrie up from the airport, I wanted to show him my latest purchase, a two-door convertible sports car. Driving with the roof down reminded Barrie of the sports cars he had owned over the years. Despite the UK’s unpredictable weather

and the inherent impracticality of a convertible, especially in the rain, Barrie embraced the moment. He didn't complain but instead indulged me in a conversation about cars, bringing up memories from his own life. The photograph above captures his spirit of 'going with the flow' and a sense of fun. Barrie had an easygoing nature and knew how to enjoy life's small pleasures, even if it was just a ride in a convertible on a cloudy British day.

Reflections on Mortality

Barrie was a man of great introspection. We often spoke about life, death, and the legacy he would leave behind. He shared his plans for the future of **STERA**, the Shroud of Turin Education and Research Association, ensuring that its mission would continue long after he was gone. He once told me, *"I pray that when my time comes, my body will go before my mind."* It's safe to say that even in his final years, Barrie's mind was as sharp and vibrant as ever.

A Final Exchange

In April, shortly before his diagnosis, I had what would be my final email exchange with Barrie. He wrote to me:

*"I have the fondest memories of my five years attending the Jalsa and still miss all my friends in the Ahmadiyya community. I also realise how privileged we were to spend time with His Holiness each year. If you see him, please send him my warmest greetings and my deepest appreciation for the time he gave us. As for travelling, I don't miss it one bit!
I was doing 40 to 50 thousand miles each year and was looking for a way to cut back when COVID came along and solved that problem. I definitely don't miss airports, airplanes, and long trans-Atlantic flights!
At age 77, it was time to give my body a rest."*

I replied:

"I echo your sentiments about very fond memories. I love how you became a core member of the team. So many people at the mosque ask me about you when they meet me. I get asked how I am, how the family is, then the next question will be, 'How is Barrie doing?' You definitely entered the hearts of many, many Ahmadis."

His final reply was short but heartfelt:

"I am happy to hear that the Ahmadiyya community feels about me the same way I feel about them!"

A Final Prayer

In closing, I would like to offer the Islamic prayer recited when someone passes away: *Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un* — "To God do we belong, and to God do we return." This serves as a reminder that while Barrie is no longer with us, his spirit and the legacy of his work will continue to live on. His contributions to the world of knowledge and the hearts he touched will never be forgotten.

Thank you, Barrie, for all that you gave us.

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