

# UAE-based mosque attack survivor forgives killer on fourth anniversary

**Adeeb Sami suffered serious injuries in the Christchurch mass shooting that claimed the lives of 51 people, including many of his close friends**

by [Mazhar Farooqui](#)



Khaleej Times, Tuesday, March 14, 2023, 4:55pm.

The idea of March triggers painful memories for UAE resident Adeeb Sami that he wants to erase from his mind but cannot.

It was on this day four years ago that a white supremacist stormed the Al Noor Mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, during Friday prayers and killed 51 people, including some of Sami's close friends.

Sami, a dad of four and director of an American engineering firm at Al Ain, who was seriously wounded in the attack, still bears physical scars from the mass shooting with several bullet fragments lodged in his body. However, the emotional scars run even deeper.

Despite enduring immense pain and trauma that he has endured, the New Zealand passport holder of Iraqi origin has discovered courage and compassion to forgive the perpetrator of the heinous crime that nearly cost him his life.

In an interview with *Khaleej Times* at his Al Ain residence, the mosque massacre survivor said he has found comfort and guidance in Islamic teachings that promote the virtues of suppressing anger and granting forgiveness. Citing a verse from the Holy Quran, he said, “Verily Allah loves Al Muhsinun (the good doers)”.

Sami, who turns 57 on March 24, said he bears no grudge against the killer.



Brenton Tarrant, the Australian responsible for carrying out the terror attacks and streaming the killings live, was sentenced to life imprisonment in March 2020, without the possibility of a parole – the first such sentence in New Zealand.

Tarrant has since appealed both his conviction and sentence.

“Watching the court proceedings from my home in Al Ain via an online link, I felt sad that Tarrant showed no remorse for the senseless killings,” said Sami.



“His victims were innocent Muslims and included children, women and the elderly. Four years have passed since that fateful afternoon on March 15, 2019, but I am still plagued by nightmares of the tragedy.”

## **Total recall**

Sami had arrived in Christchurch with wife Sanaa the previous day to surprise his twins — daughter Hamsa and son Ali — on their 23rd birthday.





“Since I was in town without my friends’ knowledge, I arrived early at the mosque in hope of catching up with them during Friday prayers,” he recalled.

Unknown to Sami, his sons Abdullah and Ali were also on their way to the same mosque.

Sami said the imam had barely concluded his speech when he heard a commotion followed by a burst of gunfire.

“My first thought was that somebody was bursting firecrackers. The perception changed abruptly when a bullet struck me in the back.”

As Sami fell to the floor grimacing in pain, his Palestinian friend Abdul Fateh, who was sitting next to him asked, "Are you okay?" to which he replied, "No, I have been shot."

“Fateh put his comforting arms around me and said, ‘Don’t worry, I will save you.’ Just then the assailant entered the prayer room. Lying wounded and bleeding, I watched helplessly as he changed his weapon and advanced towards us menacingly, yelling profanities and shooting indiscriminately at anyone who survived the initial wave of attack.”



## Scarred for life

“He shot Fateh in the head point blank. The image of my best friend reciting Shahada as his body convulsed in the last throes has forever scarred me.”



Sami said as the worshippers scrambled for cover, he caught a glimpse of his son Ali and instinctively threw himself over him to shield him. “That’s when I got hit a second time. The bullet pierced my right shoulder. I thought this was it. I was going to die.”

Sami recounted how he lay still amid scores of dead bodies pretending to be dead as the shooter strolled around languidly and picked his target.



**“Those were the most agonising moments of my life. It was only after the gunman left that I found out that Ali had escaped with only a minor bruise on his face. It was caused by the bullet that zipped past him and hit me in the shoulder. Everyone around us was either dead or dying. My son took off my trousers and belt, and strapped it on the wounds to stop the blood loss as we waited for paramedics”**

Sami underwent multiple life-saving surgeries in hospital where he spent 19 days during which he was visited by then New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden and Prince William.



He recovered from the wounds but several bullet splinters remain lodged in his body.

“I have to constantly monitor their lead content. Right now, it’s on the higher side,” said Ali, who now carries a clearance letter from for airport security when he passes metal detectors.

“Life has not been the same since. I feel jittery every time I visit a mosque in any country other than the UAE, the safest place in the world and my home for 25 years,” he said.

Ali’s wife Sanaa, who was at a nearby supermarket when she heard about the shooting, said she knew most of the victims.

“One of them was an adorable 13-year-old child who I taught Quran to. I will never forget the image of her mother frantically searching the hospital for her son, asking everyone in sight if they had seen him. Ali, who knew that the child had passed away, tried to avoid breaking the devastating news to her by repeatedly saying that he didn't know where the child was. Eventually, the mother asked Ali to look her in the eyes, and upon seeing the look on his face, she understood the truth. She quietly said, 'Thank you, now I can pray for him.' That scene has stayed with me all these years. It’s truly a miracle that my husband and sons survived that horrific attack but my heart is heavy with sorrow for the families of those who were not as fortunate.”

## **Second chance at life**

On the first anniversary of the attack, Sanaa hosted a surprise party at the Equestrian Club to celebrate her husband’s second chance at life. “He is like a newborn again, starting over,” she joked. “It’s hard to believe he’s turning four years old now!”



Sami said the incident has brought the family closer and strengthened his faith.

“Everything happens for a reason. Ramadan starts in a few days. I see this as an opportunity to channel my emotions and energy into growing spiritually and building a stronger relationship with Allah. Although what has happened cannot be undone, I believe that through prayer and forgiveness, I can find peace and healing.”

*mazhar@khaleejtimes.com*