Family, friends, colleagues, and all who knew and loved Michael, thank you for gathering here today to honour a life that gave so much, so steadily, and so well.

We come together in sadness, yes.
But also in gratitude.
Gratitude for the years we had with him, and for the ways he shaped who we are.

To many of you he was Michael Andrew Patel.
To most of us he was simply Mikey.

He was born on 9 September 1979 in Manchester, the son of Raj and Sunita, first-generation parents who taught us the meaning of effort, decency, and looking out for one another.
He died on 20 January this year, at the age of 46.
The number shocks us.
The measure of his life does not.
He filled his years with purpose.

Mikey was the eldest of us three.
Elder brother, yes, but also teacher, keeper of calm, setter of standards.
He had that particular talent of an older sibling: he could tease you mercilessly on a Monday and then argue your case at full volume on a Tuesday.
He was my mentor before I knew what mentorship meant.
He was Priya’s confident ally and fiercest fan.
He was the quiet cheer at the end of every phone call—“You’ve got this, just keep going”—and, as many here will recognise, he meant it.

He read Law at the University of Leeds, and it suited him.

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Not because he liked to win arguments—though he did enjoy winning them—but because he believed rules should be fair and systems should be humane.
He became a solicitor specialising in immigration and housing, where real lives depend on how carefully you read a clause, how patiently you listen, and how brave you are in hard moments.
He founded a free legal clinic because justice, to him, was not an abstract noun—it was a place with a door that should be open.

Aisha, you were his partner in every sense of the word.
He adored you.
He admired your strength and your wit, and he cooked for you as though it were a private love language.
To Niam and Zara, your dad was the sure hand on the handlebars, the voice that could turn storm to shelter.
He was deeply proud of you both—your kindness, your curiosity, your humour—and he worked the hours he did so that your world could be wider and kinder than the one he began in.

Mum and Dad, Raj and Sunita, he carried your values in everything he did.
He never forgot where he came from.
He wore integrity like a well-made suit—never flashy, always exactly right.
He honoured family duty without ever making it feel like duty.

Mikey had a steady centre.
Principled, calm under pressure, generous with his time, and disarmingly funny.
In a crisis, he didn’t raise his voice; he lowered the temperature.
His humour arrived like a release valve—dry, economical, and perfectly timed.
I’ve seen rooms exhale because he was in them.

He believed in service that counts.
He took on difficult cases—the ones that exhausted others—because he knew what was at stake: a roof, a visa, a childhood not fractured by bureaucracy.
When a client wavered, he would say, gently, “We’ll go one step at a time,” and then he would walk with them, one step at a time.

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Colleagues will remember his quiet courage in court, his notes that ran to the margin but never lost the thread, his door that was somehow always open even when deadlines crowded the desk.

Sundays belonged to cricket.
He coached local youth with the patience of a monk and the mischief of someone who still loved the game like a child.
If a kid fumbled a catch, he'd adjust the hands, crack a small joke, and offer another ball before embarrassment could settle.
He measured progress by confidence gained, not just runs scored.

And then there was the rest of him.
Chess on rainy evenings, not to show cleverness but to enjoy thinking together.
Walking the Peaks at a rhythm that let conversation breathe, boots scuffing, horizon widening.
Cooking Gujarati curries the way our grandmother taught us, tasting with the back of a spoon, insisting—as ever—that tempered mustard seeds are patience made visible.
Classical guitar late at night, when the house was quiet and the music could unspool the day.
He had a way of making home feel complete.

My favourite memory is one many of you have heard, because he turned it into our story.
A spur-of-the-moment road trip to the Scottish Highlands, the sort of plan that begins with "What if…" and ends with a motorway exit missed on purpose.
We got lost somewhere beautiful.
We found a loch just as the sun was lowering itself into the water, and the world went very still.
We sat on the bonnet, drank tea from a flask that tasted faintly of last week's masala, and talked about everything and nothing—about work and family, cricket and courage, the small ways you try to be useful in a complicated world.
At some point he said, "It's not about being the loudest; it's about lasting."
That was Mikey.

Not noise.
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Endurance, done kindly.

People will miss many things.
His steady advice—offered without fuss, free of judgement.
His way with hard decisions—he listened long enough to discover the question behind the question.
His habit of making space at the table—literal and figurative—so that a newcomer never stayed a stranger for long.
At Diwali, at Eid with Aisha’s family, at any ordinary Tuesday supper, he would shift chairs, ladle more daal, and make you feel you belonged.
That was his kind of hospitality: not spectacle, but welcome.

He lived by values that are easy to say and hard to practise.
Justice, not as a slogan but as sustained effort.
Integrity, which meant doing the right thing when nobody was clapping.
Family duty, not as obligation but as pride.
Service to others, because he believed a life well-lived leaves a trail of help behind it.

He was disarmingly funny.
Not the centre of attention—unless the centre needed steadying.
A glance across the room during a chaotic family gathering, a quip under his breath that rescued the evening.
Once, when I overcomplicated a chess position and lectured him on my brilliant plan, he waited, moved a single pawn, and said, “Sometimes the elegant thing is the simple thing.”
I lost, and learned, and laughed.

He was generous with time.
In a profession where time is billed, he spent it freely—with clients who had none to spare, with junior colleagues who needed a sounding board, with community organisations that required a solicitor willing to read the small print and return the call.

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He founded a free legal clinic because he knew the law without access is a locked library.
He staffed it on evenings when he could have been home, and somehow he made it home by cooking late and eating later, content that the day had amounted to something that mattered.

For those of us closest to him, there is an ache in the daily things.
Reaching for the phone at a crossroads and remembering that the voice we relied on will not answer.
Looking at a cricket bat in the hallway, a half-finished chess game, a guitar resting against a chair.
Grief is particular like that.
But so is love.
And the measure of our love is in what we carry forward.

To Aisha, to Niam and Zara—your family and this room full of people are here for you, not just today.
When you need someone to coach a net session, we'll be there.
When homework turns to questions about the world, we'll try to listen the way he did.
When celebrations come, we'll keep his place at the table, not as an absence but as a reminder to include one more person who needs a seat.

To Mum and Dad—he learned from you how to move through the world with dignity.
He honoured you in how he lived.
And he honoured you in how he loved, by making family the anchor rather than the afterthought.

To Priya—he loved your grit and your grace, and he trusted you with his best thoughts.
He would want us to look after one another now with the same unspectacular consistency he offered every day.

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To his colleagues and clients—he respected you.
He believed the law could be a humane instrument, wielded carefully.
If you wish to honour him in your work, ask the extra question, read the extra page, and make the call that might change a life.

There is a practical way to pay tribute as well.
Donations in Michael’s memory can be made to the Legal Aid Practitioners Group, an organisation close to his convictions and his daily work.
He would have liked that.
He preferred impact over flowers.

After this service, there will be a reception with his favourite vegetarian dishes.
Please come.
Eat.
Tell stories.
Argue cheerfully about cricket selections.
Swap recipes, compare chili heat levels, and let the sound of community do what it always did in his presence—gather, steady, and warm us.

I’ve tried to keep to facts, because he trusted facts.
He was 46.
He was born in Manchester.
He read Law at Leeds.
He was a respected solicitor who founded a free legal clinic.
He specialised in immigration and housing.
He coached cricket on Sundays.
He played chess, cooked Gujarati curries, walked the Peaks, and played classical guitar.
He was principled, calm under pressure, generous with his time, and disarmingly funny.
He was the husband of Aisha, the father of Niam and Zara, the son of Raj and Sunita, the brother to Priya and to me.

Those are facts.

But they don’t quite capture the thing that made him Mikey.

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So let me end with the image that does.
Two brothers on the shore of a Highland loch at sunset, talking about everything and nothing.
The evening cooling.
The tea far too sweet.
No big declarations.
Just presence, patience, and the quiet decision to keep turning up for the things that matter.

That is how he lived.
That is what he leaves with us.

May we honour him by lasting where it counts.
By making space at our tables.
By choosing the elegant simple thing when drama tempts us.
By standing up for those who need a hand.
By coaching, listening, and giving our time away as though it were the point of having it.

Mikey, elder brother, mentor, and our quiet champion—
thank you for the standard you set and the way you cheered us on.
We will keep going.
We will keep your seat.
And we will try, in our different ways, to make you proud.

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