

Qiblah Change

Background, Significance & Lessons



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Introduction

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Hundreds of millions of Muslims turn their faces towards this sacred, blessed point on earth at least five times a day. The Ka`bah, the most remarkable symbol of Islam, is the *qiblah*, the direction to which every Muslim should face during



prayers and around which millions gather during the rituals of Hajj. The Ka`bah and Al-Masjid Al-Haram enjoy a grand status long before the advent of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as the first place on earth dedicated for worshipping Allah.

However, the Ka`bah was not selected as the Muslims' *qiblah* at the beginning. Rather, Al-Quds was the direction towards which

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Muslims prayed for years in Makkah and in Madinah. **So what happened then? And why do Muslims face Ka`bah now?**

This eBook explains the circumstances behind the first selection of Al-Quds as the *qiblah* and then the shift towards the Ka`bah.

Read in this eBook about the significance of the change of the *qiblah*, the lessons and indications of selecting Al-Ka`bah as the *qiblah*, the responsibility entrusted to the Ummah by this selection and the spiritual dimensions of the incident.



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CHAPTER ONE

About the *Qiblah* Change



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***Qiblah* Change: FAQs**

Shari`ah Staff



The *Qiblah* change was a special moment in the Muslim history. It was a change that touched one of the main pillars of Islam and that had various indications and implications.

Below you can find answers for frequently asked questions about the *qiblah*, the incident of the *qiblah* change and the Ka`bah.

■ ***What is the meaning of qiblah?***

Qiblah means the direction that Muslims face when they perform their prayers (*salah*).

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■ **What is the significance of *qiblah*?**

Facing the *qiblah* is one of the basic requirements of performing *salah* which is one of the five pillars of Islam. Besides, the very act of facing the *qiblah* and the *qiblah* itself (the Ka`bah) has spiritual indications and bearings on Muslims. Read more on this aspect in our folder: [Qiblah Change: Unity and identity](#).

■ **What was the first *qiblah*?**

The first *qiblah* that Muslims faced in their prayers was Al-Aqsa Mosque.

■ **When did the *qiblah* change take place?**

The command to shift the direction of *salah* to the Ka`bah was revealed to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) about 16-17 months after his immigration to Madinah.

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■ What is the Ka`bah?

The Ka`bah is a cubic building in the middle of Al-Masjid Al-Haram in Makkah. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that the Ka`bah was the first house built on earth for worshipping Allah. (Aal `Imran 3:96)

■ Who built the Ka`bah?

Scholars and historians say that the Ka`bah has been reconstructed between 5 to 12 times. According to some of them, the very first construction of the Ka`bah was done by Prophet Adam (peace and blessings be upon him). After this, Prophet Ibrahim and Isma`il (peace and blessings be upon them) rebuilt the Ka`bah.

■ Do Muslims worship the Ka`bah?

No, Muslims do not worship anything or anyone but Allah the Almighty.

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When Muslims face the Ka`bah in the prayers, they do not do so because they worship the Ka`abah but rather because they are commanded by Allah to pray this way towards this direction.

The prayer itself does not include any mention of the Ka`abh and none of its words is addressed to the Ka`bah. In *salah*, Muslims praise Allah and supplicate Him alone.

The same applies to the *tawaf* (circumambulating the K`bah during pilgrimage). No Muslim think of worshipping the Ka`bah through performing *tawaf*. Like the prayer, the *tawaf* is dedicated to praising the glory of Allah, remembering Him and asking for His blessings and favors.

In fact, worshipping Ka`bah is deemed a type of disbelief that takes one out of the realm of Islam, just like worshipping any other object.

■ What is the story of changing the *qiblah*?

In Makkah before the immigration to Madinah, Muslims were commanded to face Jerusalem in their prayer. This was the first *qiblah* that Muslims faced during the *salah*. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the Companions submitted to the command of Allah.

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Since Jerusalem is north of Makkah, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to stand south of the Ka`bah in his prayers so that he could face both the Ka`bah and Al-Aqsa Mosque. That was impossible, however, in Madinah because Madinah is located north of Makkah and south of Jerusalem.

After immigrating to Madinah, the Muslims continued to face Jerusalem for more 16 or 17 months. The Jews of Madinah rejoiced the fact that the Prophet had to take their sacred city as a *qiblah*. They used this to spread doubts about the validity of Islam.

In the meantime, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to look up to heaven waiting eagerly for a command to face the Ka`bah. Finally, after about 16 months in Madinah, Allah commanded Muslims to face the K`bah in their prayer.



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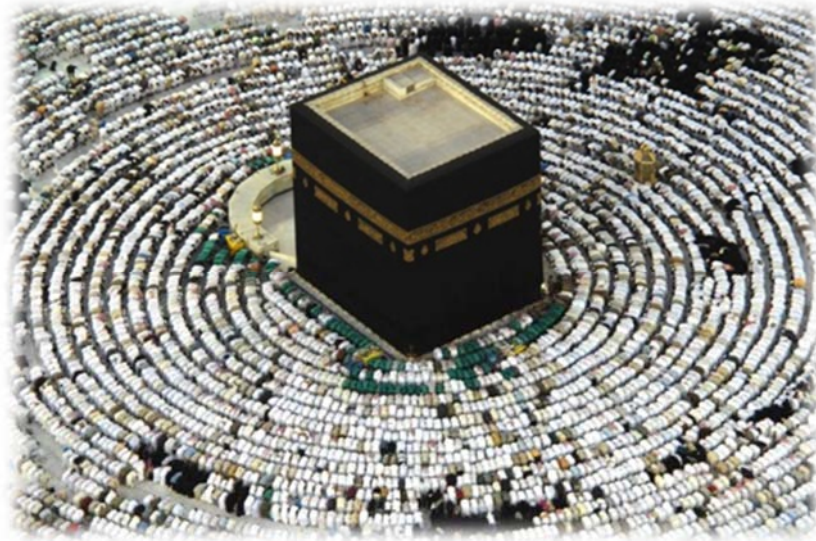
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The Story of Changing the *Qiblah*

Adil Salahi



An important event which took place some 16 or 17 months after the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had settled in Madinah was the change of direction Muslims face when they offer their Prayers. While the Prophet was still in

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Makkah, he was ordered to turn towards Jerusalem when he prayed.

Muslims complied with this divine instruction and continued to do so after they had emigrated to Madinah, where they came in close contact with the Jews.

The Jews used the fact that Muslims adopted their own holy city as their *qiblah* to claim that Judaism was the religion of truth and that Muhammad and his companions should adopt Judaism, instead of calling on the Jews to accept Islam.

Now, nearly 18 months after the establishment of the Islamic state in Madinah, new Qur'anic revelations instructed the Prophet and the Muslims to turn towards the Ka`bah in Makkah when they prayed.

The Prophet himself was very pleased with this change, which he keenly desired but dared not request.

The Jews in Madinah countered with a sustained campaign of criticism, as they felt that the change deprived them of their argument for refusing to accept Islam. Their new campaign sought to create doubts in the minds of Muslims as to the basis of their own religion.

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If it was right, the Jews argued, that the Muslims should formerly face Jerusalem in their Prayers, then the new direction is wrong. They also told the Muslims:

"Your Prayers from now on would then be of no value. If, on the other hand, the new direction is right and the Ka`bah is the true *qiblah*, then your Prayers in the past were in vain."

The Jews also argued that God, the Lord Who knows all, does not change His instructions in that manner. The change clearly showed, the Jews went on, that Muhammad did not really receive any revelation from God. Reading the verses which speak of this subject and the argument that ensued in Madinah shows that the Jewish campaign was not without results.

Reassurance was needed and was, indeed, provided in a long passage in the Quran, which runs from verse 106 to verse 150 in the surah entitled Al-Baqarah (The Cow). A word of explanation here may be useful.

Arabs revered the Ka`bah before the advent of Islam. To them it was the symbol of their national glory. It was also one of the factors which held the Arab tribes together. Islam, however, requires of its followers total, undivided loyalty. Muslims must dedicate themselves wholly to God and the cause of Islam.

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The Prophet's companions must, therefore, abandon all their former loyalties, tribal, racial or national. Hence the need to separate their worship from their traditional reverence of the Ka`bah. To accomplish this they were ordered to turn towards Jerusalem when they prayed.

After a period of time, when the Muslims had accepted the new situation – moving away, in the process, from the rest of the Arabs – they were taught to regard the Ka`bah in a different light. They were told to face it in their Prayers because it was built by the two Prophets, Abraham and Ishmael, as a place wholly devoted to the worship of God alone.

Thus it becomes part of the heritage of the Islamic nation, which has come into existence by way of answering Abraham's Prayers to raise among his seed a Prophet who would teach them the true religion.

Thus, having achieved the objective of making the Muslims turn to Jerusalem in their Prayers for a while, it was now time to give them their own distinctive *qiblah*– the Ka`bah, the first house of worship ever built.

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This process made the Muslims keenly aware that they were the true heirs of Abraham and his religion, based on total submission to God.

To be distinct from others is very important when one speaks of faith and worship, for worship is the visible expression of the beliefs which take root in the soul. If worship is visibly distinct from that of other religions, then it strengthens the perception that the religion itself is unique. The purpose of giving the Muslims their own *qiblah* must be seen in this light.





Who Built the Ka`bah?

Answer by Sheikh Ahmad Kutty

Q.

Respected scholars, as-salamu `alaykum.

What I understand from the Qur'an and tafsir (Arabic for: exegesis of the Qur'an) is that Prophet Ibrahim and his son Isma`il (peace and blessings be upon them) raised the foundations of the Ka`bah that were beneath the sand. I wonder who initially laid its foundations; was it Prophet Adam (peace and blessings be upon him)? Jazakum Allahu khayran.

A.

Wa `alaykum as-salam wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.

Dear questioner, we are pleased to receive your question, which shows the confidence you place in us. May Allah reward

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you abundantly for your interest in knowing the teachings of Islam.

Scholars and historians say that the Ka`bah has been reconstructed between 5 to 12 times. According to some of them, the very first construction of the Ka`bah was done by Prophet Adam (peace and blessings be upon him). After this, Prophet Ibrahim and Isma`il (peace and blessings be upon them) rebuilt the Ka`bah.

In response to your question, **Sheikh Ahmad Kutty**, a senior lecturer and an Islamic scholar at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, illustrated,

We have no clear evidence in the sources about this, although there are some reports that indicate that the Ka`bah was built by Prophet Adam (peace and blessings be upon him) and it had been a site of pilgrimage from ancient times; as such, it had been visited by various prophets. These reports, however, do not pass the rigorous standards of scientific verification established by the scholars of Hadith.

It is certainly possible, however, to infer from the Qur'an that Prophet Ibrahim and his son Isma`il (peace and blessings be upon them) only rebuilt the Ka`bah, and

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that Prophet Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him) was guided to the site. And the Hadith reports indicate that it had been in ruins and buried by a heap of sand. We cannot go any farther than this to elaborate the details for lack of clear evidences in the sources.

It is better to leave the issue of building the Ka`bah at this point and stop speculating on such matters, leaving them to the knowledge of Allah.

Allah Almighty knows best.

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CHAPTER TWO

A Significant Event





Changing the *Qiblah* or Religious Authority?

Dr. Ali Al-Halawani

Muslims usually welcome the month of Sha`ban with various religious activities only few of which are based on valid religious textual proofs; whereas, the bulk is groundless.



The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to fast much during the month of Sha`ban as

narrated by `A'ishah (may Allah be blessed with her). This is a valid ritual. However, besides one valid ritual there are many other baseless practices in which many Muslims get involved. This is particularly true in reference to the midnight of Sha`ban, as some Muslims perform special prayers after Maghrib asking Allah to increase their sustenance, prolong their lifespan and grant them happiness.

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However, a great event which can be regarded as a turning point in the history of Islam has taken place in this blessed month. Though this event might indicate many crucial things, and the surrounding conditions might attest to its deep impact, it did not draw full attention of Muslim historians and/or biographers.

Amid the events related by the great historian Ibn Hisham after the Prophet's emigration to Madinah, he says in no more than two lines in his outstanding book on the biography of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him):

"It is narrated that the *qiblah* was changed in Sha`ban after 18 months of the Prophet's advent to Madinah".

However, using the phrase, "*It is narrated* ", indicates that the event did not draw much attention so that historians become keen on verifying its exact date.

Notwithstanding, the event was so important that the Jewish tribes in Madinah waged a fierce psychological warfare against Islam and its first teacher. It is to be noted here that before this event takes place, there was a covenant between the Jews and the Prophet which they did not even respect. In fact, though they realized the ramifications of the event well, they went

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astray in their reaction and opened fire against the true religion of Islam.

They realized that it is not only a matter of changing the *qiblah* in Prayer from one direction to another. Rather, the divine message and consequently religious authority has completely shifted from the Children of Israel to those of Isma'il. Accordingly, their claims of religious glory, being the sole mediator between heaven and earth, and being the only guided nation among an ocean of astray ones; all these allegations have ended.

Now, let us start the story from the beginning...

■ *The One Original Qiblah*

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) dealt with the Jews who used to live around Madinah in a distinguished manner. This stemmed from the fact that the Jews were closer to divine revelation than any other nation at that time.

After Hijrah, a divine decree that the Prophet as well as Muslims should direct their faces in prayer towards Jerusalem was revealed. Most scholars maintain the view that this decree was designed to test Muslims' response to the last message as well

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as its honorable Messenger. This is evidenced by the Qur'an as the Almighty says,

{...and We appointed the *Qiblah* to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (from the Faith). Indeed, it was (a change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah.} (Al-Baqarah 2: 143)

This divine *ayah* implies a well-established fact that should be borne in the minds of all, that the Sacred House (i.e. Ka`bah) is the *qiblah* and there is no other *qiblah* whatsoever in the true faith but this one. Accordingly, facing Jerusalem in Prayer for about 18 months does not defy this fact and does not mean that Jerusalem has become the *qiblah* regardless of its sanctity. Though Jerusalem was a landing place for many divine revelations and the abode of many sent prophets, facing it in Prayer was a two-purpose test. First, it was designed to test Muslims' readiness to desert all their personal or traditional attachments. Second, to test the Jews' willingness to follow the true religion and the seal of all prophets without questioning or objecting to the divine decrees he brings with him.

To make sure that this fact - that the Ka`bah is the original *qiblah* - the Qur'an does skip it and thus asserts,

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{The first House (of worship) appointed for men was that at Bakka: Full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings: In it are Signs Manifest; (for example), the Station of Abraham; whoever enters it attains security; Pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to Allah, those who can afford the journey; but if any deny faith, Allah stands not in need of any of His creatures. } (Aal `Imran 3: 96-97)

■ Religious Glory Lost

After the Prophet was commanded to direct his face in Prayer towards the Ka`bah, the Jews realized something which rigorously upset them; namely, the fading of their religious glory. As they, in the very beginning and due to the Prophet's special treatment to them, fancied he would pursue their very steps. However, after that divine decree, it became apparent to them that this was nothing but mirage and that the Prophet's message was a corrective one. Truly, it was revealed to correct and amend what they have falsified of the religion of Allah and the distortions and confusion they have attributed to it.

The Jews' self-deceit that they would be guardians of the Muslim faith and that Jerusalem should be the permanent *qiblah* (peace and blessings be upon him), made them forget

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the fact that the Ka`bah is the sole *qiblah* as stated in the Qur'an and there should be no *qiblah* other than this.

However, this intentionally forgotten fact as far as the Jews were concerned, did not escape the mind of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). As he yearned for the Ka`bah all the time and used to turn his face to the sky perhaps a divine decree comes soon taking him back to the *qiblah* he earnestly longs for with his guiding insight. In this regard, the Almighty says,

{We see the turning of thy face (for guidance) to the heavens. Now shall We turn thee to a *qiblah* that shall please thee. Turn then thy face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque: Wherever ye are, turn your faces in that direction. The people of the Book know well that that is the truth from their Lord. Nor is Allah unmindful of what they do.} (Al-Baqarah 2: 144)

■ Total Submission

Consequently, the Prophet directed his face towards the Ka`bah and his heart was eased, while the Jews were dying out of malice and wrath. What they feared most in the past has become true especially when Muslims hastened to carry out the divine ordinance such as the Bani Salim folk who did not even

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wait until they finish their `Asr prayer when they were informed of the news. Instead, they changed their direction towards the Ka`bah while in *ruku`* (Arabic for: bowing) as a sign of their unquestionable obedience to Allah and His Messenger.

■ Psychological Warfare

As the Jews lost their last hope that they would continue as holders of the divine message, they waged a fierce psychological warfare against Islam and Muslims. They started to circulate rumors and raise false questions such as why did Muhammad change the *qiblah* of all past prophets and messengers though he claims to be pursuing their course?

To add fuel to the fire, they wondered, "Maybe he longs for the faith of his forefathers and that is why he turned to their *qiblah*!" Given this, they missed the fact that it was prophets Ibrahim and Isma`il who built the Ka`bah. Moreover, the Qur'an attributes the Ka`bah to Allah Himself as Almighty says,

{ ... and We covenanted with Ibrahim and Isma`il that they should sanctify My House for those who circumambulate it, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer). } (Al-Baqarah 2: 125)

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Explicitly, the Qur'an defies the rumors spread by the Jews, refutes their allegations, and even describes them as foolish. Almighty says,

{The fools among the people will say: "What hath turned them from the *qiblah* to which they were used?" Say: To Allah belong both east and west: He guideth whom He will to a straight way. } (Al-Baqarah 2: 142)

Moreover, the Jews misinterpreted the concept of *righteousness* and twisted it to mean directing one's face towards Jerusalem. Consequently, according to them, when Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) directed his face away from Jerusalem and turned it towards the Ka`bah, he went astray and took a course far from righteousness and the ethics of the divine message.

■ Facts vs. Fallacies

Duly, the divine inspiration kept providing the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) with the Qur'anic *ayahs* (Arabic for: verses) that reveal the truth about the whole issue. Uninterruptedly, the *ayahs* were revealed to remove the pain caused by the rumors circulated by the Jews; to defy the psychological warfare they waged against Islam and its

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prophet; and to refute the false allegations they perpetrated to distort the image of Islam and discourage its followers.

In so doing, the Qur'an made a general statement about ownership of the whole universe and that it is only Allah Who decides to which side one should direct his face in prayer. Almighty says,

{And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah . Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing. } (Al-Baqarah 2:115)

In the same vein, the Qur'an established the correct understanding of the concept of *righteousness* in a great ayah that is called *Ayat Al-Birr* (Arabic for: the Righteousness Verse). The ayah reads,

{It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards east or west; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the prophets; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity (Zakah); to fulfill the contracts which ye have

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made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and during battle. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing. } (Al-Baqarah 2: 177)

These Qur'anic *ayahs* and the like put an end to the psychological warfare launched by the Jews against Islam and Muslims.

■ Conclusion

Losing the banner of the divine message, the Jews could not help divulging their hatred and grudges against Islam and Muslims. In fact, the Jews felt the fading of their religious glory upon the advent of Islam and it became a flagrant fact when the *qiblah* was changed through divine revelation from Jerusalem to Makkah. They knew then that the torch has irrevocably been passed over to the Children of Isma`il.

In this regard, the Almighty says,

{Quite a number of the People of the Book wish they could turn you (people) back to infidelity after ye have believed, from selfish envy, after the Truth hath become manifest unto them: But forgive and overlook, till Allah accomplish His purpose; for Allah hath power over all things.} (Al-Baqarah 2: 109)

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In the end, I wish I knew what was left in the memory of Muslims pertaining to the impacts of this great event!

Nothing is left. Because if there is anything left, we would have realized that sticking to our faith, deriving lessons from our history, as well as maintaining our own distinct identity is the only way for our Ummah to regain its past glories.

Given this, is it acceptable that the month of Sha`ban which embraces this great event turns into a time in which many Muslims celebrate heresies and superstitions while they are unmindful of the conspiracies contrived by others?



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The *Qiblah*: A Sacred Heritage for Logical Heirs

Sayed Qutb



{Indeed We see the turning of your face to heaven, so We shall surely turn you to a *qiblah* which you shall like; turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your face towards it, and those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord; and Allah is not at all heedless of what they do.} (Al-Baqarah 2: 144)

The change of the *qiblah*, direction faced in Salah, occurred sixteen or seventeen months after the Prophet's migration, *hijrah*, to Madinah and the controversy aroused about it.

The Jews of Madinah tried to exploit the *qiblah* issue to agitate division and confusion among Muslims. However, the Qur'an

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refuted their allegations and warned them against the damage they might cause to their community.

Indeed there is no reference in the Qur'an referring to the exact date of changing the *qiblah*. However, the main facts of the situation make it clear that Salah was made as a daily religious duty for Muslims while they were still in Makkah.

They continued praying in Madinah while facing Jerusalem until the revelation of these Ayahs in which the Prophet and Muslims with him were told to **{Turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your face towards it...}** (Al-Baqarah 2: 142-144)

Jerusalem has been the *qiblah* for the Jews and the Christians. Seeing it has become the new Muslims' *qiblah*, the Jews of Madinah thought they had a ready excuse for refusing Islam. They considered the Prophet and his Companions' facing Jerusalem as their new *qiblah* a strong proof that theirs was the true religion and their *qiblah* was the original and the legitimate one. The Jews argued that Muhammad and his followers should follow their religion and refrain from trying to convert them to Islam.

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■ The Prophet Hopes for a New *Qiblah*

This was not easy for the Arab Muslims to accept, since they had always revered the Ka`bah and considered it their most sacred religious symbol. The Jewish arguments made the situation even harder for the Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad entertained a wish to turn towards the Ka`bah, and was seen looking up to the sky anxiously uttering no word trusting to Allah and His Wisdom.

Not long afterwards instructions were revealed, in the verses above, that Muslims should turn their faces towards the Ka`bah. Hearing the news, some Muslims were performing Salah and immediately turned their Salah direction toward the Ka`bah.

■ Arguments and Provoking Doubts

The Jews resented that decision which deprived them of their argument. Almighty Allah says,

{The fools among the people will say: What has turned them from their *qiblah* which they had? Say: The East and the West belong only to Allah} (Al-Baqarah 2: 142)

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They began to question the wisdom of the Muslim leadership and to arouse doubts about the validity of the religious basis of Islam. From these doubts:

1. Did the change of the *qiblah* from Jerusalem to the Ka`bah mean the Muslims had been offering Salah towards the wrong *qiblah* all that time?
2. If Jerusalem had been the right *qiblah* and it was correct to offer Salah towards it, then would it have been wrong to turn to another one? Hence, would their Salah towards the new *qiblah*, the Ka`bah, have been valid?
3. They further argued that such abrogation of earlier orders could not have been done by Allah. Hence, the decision must have been made by Muhammad himself, proving that he was not receiving any divine revelations.

The gravity of the controversy surrounding this event was clear from the considerable attention given in the Qur'an to its ramifications and the effect it had on some rank-and-file Muslims. It was also clear in the way that the Surah deals with the concept of abrogation.

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Changing of the *qiblah* was a central event in the history of Islam with far-reaching and long-term consequences. It gave Islam a new focus and identified the Muslim community as an independent nation with a *qiblah* of its own.

The earlier decision to declare Jerusalem rather than the Ka`bah as the *qiblah* was for specific educational reasons, as revealed:

{We did not make that which you would have to be the *qiblah* but that We might distinguish him who follows the Messenger from him who turns back upon his heels.} (Al-Baqarah 2: 143)

■ A Crucial Test

Before Islam, the Arabs revered the Ka`bah and considered it as a symbol of their religious and cultural heritage and glory. However, in order to test their sincerity in accepting Islam and ensure that their hearts were totally free of narrow racial or tribal loyalties, Allah initially instructed the Prophet to command his followers to adopt Jerusalem as the direction for their Salah.

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It was such a difficult instruction to carry out, but it was a crucial test of how much they really understood the nature and the spirit of their new religion. It was necessary to show how far some of those early Muslims were still influenced by pre-Islamic racial and tribal traditions.

When Muslims adopted their new direction, and the Jews had begun to exploit that situation, fresh divine instructions were received to revert to the Ka`bah as their direction for Salah.

The basis for the new decision was, however, made clear. It stemmed from the fact that the Sacred Mosque at Makkah had, in the first instance, been established by Abraham and Ishmael as a monument to pure monotheism. It was a part of the heritage of Islam which had come about in answer to Abraham's invocations to Allah to send a Messenger to his descendants, the inhabitants of Makkah, with the pure faith based on complete submission to Allah.

Giving the background and the circumstances surrounding the construction of the Ka`bah, this part of the Surah provides a fitting introduction to the issue of the *qiblah*.



■ Rightful and Natural Heirs

Changing the *qiblah* back to the Ka`bah seems to be the only logical conclusion from that discussion of the dispute between Muslims on one hand and the Jews, Christians and polytheist Arabs on the other, concerning Abraham's covenant with Allah and the right to his heritage. That covenant bounds Abraham and his descendants, from one generation to another, to be in complete submission to Allah.

The construction of the Sacred Mosque at the Ka`bah was carried out by Abraham and his son Ishmael at Allah's specific order. It is, therefore, a part of the heritage passed on to their offspring. Muhammad, as a direct descendant of Abraham and a beneficiary of his covenant with Allah, and his followers are rightful and natural heirs to that heritage, of which the Ka`bah is an important part.

The decision of declaring the Ka`bah a permanent *qiblah* for Muslims is natural and brings reality, history and feeling together in harmony. The decision could not have come sooner. Jewish hostility towards Islam and Muhammad, despite the temporary declaration of Jerusalem as a *qiblah*, did not diminish.

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They could see that their right to Abraham's religious legacy was being forfeited as the days passed, and the time had come for Muslims to emerge as independent and rightful claimants to that heritage and move on to declare its universal and eternal message to the rest of the world.

It had become imperative for Muslims to forge ahead on that way and to establish their distinct identity as a religious force for advocating the central principle of Allah's oneness, *tawhid*.

Based on the author's In the Shade of the Qur'an; translated by Adel Salahi.



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Significance of The Change of *Qiblah*

Prof. Shahul Hameed

Two momentous events in the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) bear special significance as regards the institution of Prayer (*salah*) in Islam: The *Mi'raj* (the Prophet's Ascension) and the change of the *qiblah* from Jerusalem to Makkah.



Muslims believe that during the Prophet's *Miraj*, God instituted the five daily obligatory Prayers for believers. And it was in the middle of a congregational prayer in Madinah, that God's command came to the Prophet about the change of *qiblah*.

We read about it in the Quran:

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{The fools among the people will say: "What has turned them from the *Qiblah* to which they were used?" Say: To Allah belong both East and West; He guides whom He pleases to a Way that is straight. } (Al-Baqarah 2:142)

"The fools" in this context are those who criticize the change of *qiblah*, without any understanding of the matter. Before considering the meaning of the change of *qiblah*, we need to understand the importance of what is called the *qiblah* for Muslims.

For Muslims, none of the daily prayers can be done correctly without knowing the *qiblah*. "*Qiblah*" means orientation, or a sense of true direction.

At the beginning of every Prayer, the Muslims face the house of God in Makkah, thereby spiritually connecting themselves along an invisible line that passes through every point on earth, to the spiritual center in Makkah.

Whether they pray alone, or in congregation, they do so as part of the greater community of Islam. Thus, five times a day, each Muslim is aligned to the other Muslims who form concentric circles around the Ka`bah encircling the earth.

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Imagine watching the scene from space; and we may see all the Muslims at prayer like a huge flower the size of the earth, opening and closing its millions of petals. Each of those petals represents a Muslim at prayer.

Thus the *qiblah* (which is unique to Islam) has a significant role in bringing together every nation, race, and tribe on this planet regularly five times a day, so as to link them to the common center at Makkah.

Being central to the worshippers in Islam, the *qiblah* serves as the heart of the Ummah of Islam, supplying life-blood to the spiritual existence of Muslims all over the world and keeping the concept of unity in every sense of the term: God is One, the religion is one and the Ummah is one.

Every time we stand in prayer, Muslims may say they make a spiritual journey to the Ka`bah in Makkah, somewhat as the Prophet did during his Night Journey to Jerusalem. And from the Ka`bah, our spirit travels upward towards Allah the Almighty just as the Prophet during his Ascension from Jerusalem. So for a pious and sincere worshipper, every prayer he performs involves Night Journey and an Ascension, as it were.

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During his Night Journey and Ascension (Israa' and Mi`raj), in a mystical experience of immense spiritual significance, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) led all the earlier prophets in prayer in Al-Aqsa mosque at Jerusalem. This was a wonderful event that symbolized not only the oneness of both the houses of worship — the Ka`bah and Al-Aqsa — but also the oneness of the guidance of Allah given through all the prophets.

Because Prophet Muhammad was sent as the final prophet for the whole of humanity consisting chiefly of the children of Abraham by his eldest son Ishmael, and the second son Isaac, (peace be upon them both). Jerusalem represents the line of Isaac, as Makkah does the line of Ishmael.

The foregoing highlights the significance of both the cities serving as the *qiblah* of Muslims: First Jerusalem and then Makkah. The final Prophet born in the line of Ishmael, the first son of Abraham, at Makkah was commanded to turn to Jerusalem for prayer; and then as a significant turning point in the process of the completion of the religion of Islam, God commands Prophet Muhammad to turn to the first house of God in Makkah for worship.

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And God says in the Quran what means:

{Thus, have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qiblah to which thou was used, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (From the Faith). Indeed it was (A change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah Make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people Most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful.} (Al-Baqarah 2:143)

In the above verse the use of the expression, "an Ummah justly balanced that ye might be witnesses over the nations" is particularly noteworthy. Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad is not to be considered the prophet of just a region, a race or a nation any more. Rather, he is the Prophet of the whole of humanity; and the community of believers will be a justly balanced middle nation with Makkah as its center. Jerusalem, representing the earlier versions of the religion, was not the *qiblah* anymore. Makkah, representing the patriarch of mankind Abraham and all his children, was to be recognized as the center of the completed religion of God.

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This means that the change of *qiblah* had far more significance than most people at that time understood.

The change of the *qiblah* is a declaration by God of the perfection of the first religion as the final religion for mankind. Through the two mystical events in the life of the final messenger, Muhammad, God completes and perfects the religion for humanity and declares the Ka`bah in Makkah as the center of the world as well as of His religion.

And those who recognize and accept this cannot be parochial or ethnocentric; they have got to be above race, region or nation; they have to be at the center as a justly balanced middle nation serving as "witnesses over nations" as the true representatives of the whole of humanity.



CHAPTER THREE

Lessons and Reflections





One *Qiblah*, United Community

Dr. Mohannad Hakeem

It was a brand new community, encompassing people from different ethnic groups, social classes, religious and educational backgrounds. They had all reasons to disagree and fight in between themselves, and they did fight before Islam; but they had one main cause to unite for: Allah, the Almighty, and His beloved Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Allah says about this unique unity:



{If you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have brought their hearts together; but Allah brought them together. Indeed, He is Exalted in Might and Wise.} (Al-Anfal 8: 63)

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After planting the seeds of brotherhood in Madinah between the Muhajirun (Immigrants to Madinah) and the Ansar (the supporters, Muslims of Madinah), many rulings and events nurtured and strengthened that brotherhood. Building the masjid, in addition to establishing the prayers in congregation all resulted in a new feeling of harmony and chemistry between the citizens of that newly formed state.

Few months later, particularly in Sha`ban of the second year after Hijrah, the Companions moved to a higher form of unity. They were given their own *qiblah*, Makkah, after three years of praying towards Jerusalem which was a shared *qiblah* with the Jews. This time, it is a global unity that is not bounded by a certain time and a certain location. It is a unity that should be inherited from the generation of the Companions and reflected in our daily lives and actions.

■ **Praying in congregation while being alone**

Have you ever asked yourself, before raising your hands in *takbir* to start your *salah*: How many Muslims are facing the same sacred place at this moment? You might not know their names, you will definitely not understand their languages, you may or may not get along with them, but you are doing the

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same great act of worship at the end of the day. This is such an amazing feeling that will give your prayer a new dimension. You will be praying in congregation (*jama`ah*), even if you were praying alone in your bedroom, at the mall, or in the middle of nowhere. This feeling continues when you read in Al-Fatihah, **{Guide us to the straight path.}** (Al-Fatihah 1:6) You do not say "Guide me", but "Guide us". And you are actually one of the thousands of Muslims who are addressing the same Lord with the same *du`aa'*.

■ A reality check

After discussing how we should be, it is time to be honest and transparent with ourselves. We are currently good at disuniting ourselves, wasting our efforts in endless debates, and spreading divisions among each other. We tend to highlight the 1% that we disagree on before we focus on how much we have in common. Muslims living in the West, particularly in bigger cities, know exactly what I am talking about. We experience the clashes between different Islamic centers or organizations (that might be located within 2-3 miles from each other, attract or even compete over the same audience); we suffer from the endless conflict of moon sighting vs. calculations to determine

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the start of Ramadan every single year; we feel the confusion among people who listen to different scholars and different schools of thoughts and get stuck in between.

In the middle of all of this, the incident of changing the *qiblah* comes every year to remind us about the big picture, the common objective that we cannot disagree upon, even if we try. It turns our faces from inner debates and conflicts towards the main objective of being servants of the One God and representatives for Him on earth.

■ Zooming in to Ka`bah scene: Another form of unity

If you travel with your heart and imagination thousands of miles to Makkah, to the same place you are facing, and zoom in to that amazing picture that brings tears to our eyes, you will notice another form of unity. You will see thousands, if not millions of Muslims, unified in one outfit, rotating around that same house you faced in your prayer, sometimes repeating the same slogan: “*Labayka Allahumma Labayk (Here I am at your service, O Allah, here I am)*” .

In that scene, you will see the black, the Asian, the Arab, the Desi, the rich, the poor, the young, and the old Muslim among

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the crowd. You will see yourself among them, and you will see the other millions of Muslims who are facing the same *qiblah* from distance, represented also in that scene.

I am positive that these images will give our *salah* a different taste and a different life, *insha' Allah*. I am sure that whoever feels this unity and gets this energy from the Ka`bah, cannot leave his *salah* to resume his endless debate with his Muslim brother about whether a certain act is a *bid`ah* or not. I am confident that any lady after finishing her “virtual” congregational prayer with other Muslims will think twice before carrying a piece of news that will cause tension and hatred between family members, neighbors, and coworkers.

Our religion carries a lot of meanings, messages, and symbols in every act of worship. It is really important to reflect on those messages and implement them in our lives and in the lives of others.



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***Qiblah* Change: A Lesson in Complete Submission**

Dr. Wael Hamza



Allah clearly mentioned in the Qur'an one of the most important attributes of the believers,

{It does not behoove a believer, male or female, that when Allah and His Messenger have decided an affair they should exercise a choice. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has strayed to manifest error} (Al-Ahzab 33:36).

This is a fundamental quality of the believer. You will find it throughout the Qur'an: {Obey

Allah and Obey the Messenger...} (An-Nisaa' 4: 59, Al-Ma'idah 5:92, An-Nur 24:54, Muhammad 47:33, At-Taghabun 64:12) An

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unconditional and complete submission to their commands is the essence of being a Muslim.

The Prophet and his Companions demonstrated this quality very well. However, this quality is not easy to achieve. It will be challenged by *Shaytan* (the devil) and it will be tested by Allah in almost every aspect of our lives. Therefore, it needs to be developed and nurtured the same way Allah and His Messenger did with the Companions.

It was developed by the strong verses of the Qur'an, **{If you obey him, you will be guided...}** (An-Nur 24:54) It was instilled in the hearts of the believers by strong warning, **{Let those who go against his order beware lest a trial or a severe punishment afflict them}** (An-Nur 24: 63)

It was also tested through important events that the Companions, as well as generations to come, will never forget. The simple act of disobedience that took place by the archers during the battle of Uhud resulted in the killing of seventy of the Companions as well as a defeat in such a crucial battle. They paid the price and they learned the lesson. So did we and so will generations to come. The incidents are numerous. Yet the most amazing incident that helped develop such a quality was the incident of the change of the *qiblah*, the direction where Muslims point to during *salah*.



■ **A lesson in complete submission**

The first house that was built on this earth for people to worship Allah was the Sacred House of Allah in Makkah,

{The first house established for mankind is the one at Bakkah: It is full of blessings and guidance to the whole world.} (Aal `Imran 3: 96)

Ibrahim and Isma`il (peace and blessings be upon them) reestablished it and made it the destination for all people to worship Allah. Ibrahim called upon people to come and perform Hajj and people came to it from all over the inhabited world. The Arabs developed complete love towards it and it was the place for Hajj to all of them.

Even after the Arabs strayed from the faith of Ibrahim and started worshipping idols, the Sacred House of Allah in Makkah continued to have the precious value in their hearts. The people of Quraysh surrounded it with idols that Arabs used to worship to attract all the Arabs to it. It became the symbol of religion in the peninsula and Makkah became the place to visit for all Arabs.

When Abrahah, the Yemeni king, built his own religious house, called Al-Qullays, and tried to attract attention to it, it was completely disregarded and Makkah continued to have its

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value. This drove the Yemeni king crazy. He tried to destroy this house in Makkah to promote his own house and we all know how Allah saved His house and destroyed Abrahah and his army. After the incident, the value of the House of Allah in Makkah increased even more than what it used to be especially in the hearts of those who experienced this great incident.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his Companions grew up in this environment, they glorified the House of Allah, and Makkah was the most beloved place to them. When revelation came down on the Prophet, the Qur'an continued to add more glory to the glory.

■ **{And those who believe love Allah more than all else} (Al-Baqarah 2:165)**

However, everyone loves the Ka`bah, those who believe in Allah and His Messenger and those who do not. Everyone aims for the Ka`bah, those who worship Allah as well as those who worship idols. Allah wanted to remove any attachment to anything or anyone except Him.

The believers should love the Ka`bah and adore it only because of Allah, not anything else. Muslims should face the Ka`bah not because of anything except that it is the House of Allah. For

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that to happen, Allah ordered His Messenger to face another sacred place, that was Jerusalem.

It is sure not easy on any Arab to leave the Ka`bah and face Jerusalem, especially those who grew up next to the Ka`bah. Muslims had to make the decision: following Allah's orders or following their own desires. The choice for the believers was obvious, yet wasn't easy even on the Prophet himself. Later in Madinah, after the Prophet migrated to it, the Prophet used to long for a revelation to direct him back to face Makkah during Salah. Allah said,

{We see you oft turning your face towards the sky, so We shall surely turn you to a qiblah which you shall like...} (Al-Baqarah 2:144)

The Prophet and his Companions demonstrated clear obedience to Allah. They passed a very difficult test. They abandoned the *qiblah* that they grew up knowing for the *qiblah* that Allah wanted them to have. When the love and the obedience of Allah filled their hearts, Allah ordered His Messenger to stop facing Jerusalem and start facing Makkah again. They, as well as every single Muslim who came after, face Al-Ka`bah. Now, it is because Allah Almighty commanded so.



Changing the *Qiblah* From Jerusalem to Makkah

Answer by Sheikh Ahmad Kutty

Q. Respected scholars, *as-salamu `alaykum*. Is there any reasoning mentioned anywhere for changing the *Qiblah* from Jerusalem to Makkah? *Jazakum Allahu Khayran*.

A. *Wa`alaykum as-salam wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh*.

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.

In his response to this question, **Sheikh Ahmad Kutty**, senior lecturer and Islamic scholar at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Canada, stated,

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The *qiblah* was changed from Jerusalem to the Ka`bah in Makkah, for the Ka`bah is the first and most ancient House of Worship ever built for all humankind for the purpose of worshipping Almighty Allah alone, as stated in the Qur'an. Almighty Allah says,

{The first House [of worship] appointed for humankind was that at Bakkah: Full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings} (Aal `Imran 3:96)

The shift of *qiblah* from Jerusalem to the Ka`bah thus represents Islam's stance of calling the humankind away from local or provincial shrines to the First Sanctuary, where the peoples are invited to give heed to the roots of their father, Adam.

In other words, this shift intended to unify the humanity under the Lordship of One God. Islam thus cuts at the root of all tribal, racial, and ethnic divisions that separate the peoples from one another.

Furthermore, we also learn from the traditions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) that the

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Ka`bah was the *qiblah* of the Prophets before him (peace be upon them all). We have been told that all Prophets — such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus — were also facing the Ka`bah in their Prayers.

Allah Almighty knows best.

