

## Suratul Baqarah: Verses 142 – 151

(١٤٢) سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَّهُمْ ۚ عَنِ قِبَلَتِهِمْ الَّتِي كَانُوا عَلَيْهَا ۚ قُلْ لِلَّهِ  
الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ ۚ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ۚ

(١٤٣) وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكَ ۙ أُمَّةً ۙ وَسَطًا لِّتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ  
الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ ۙ شَهِيدًا ۚ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ  
الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ ۚ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ ۚ  
وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرءُوفٌ ۙ رَّحِيمٌ ۚ

(١٤٤) قَدْ نَرَىٰ تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ ۚ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً ۚ تَرَاهَا ۙ فَوَلِّهَا ۙ فَوَلِّ  
وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ۚ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ ۚ فَوَلُّوْا وُجُوهَكُمْ ۚ شَطْرَهُ ۚ  
وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفْلٍ عَمَّا  
يَعْمَلُونَ

(١٤٥) وَلَئِن ۙ أَتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ ۙ مَا تَبِعُوا قِبْلَتَكَ ۚ وَمَا أَنْتَ  
بِتَابِعٍ ۚ قِبَلَتِهِمْ ۚ وَمَا بَعْضُهُمْ بِتَابِعٍ ۚ قِبْلَةَ بَعْضٍ ۚ وَلَئِن ۙ أَتَبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ مِّنْ  
بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ ۚ إِنَّكَ إِذًا لَّمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

(١٤٦) الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ ؟ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ آبْنَاءَهُمْ ؟ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقًا  
مِّنْهُمْ لَيَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

(١٤٧) الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ ؟ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

(١٤٨) وَلِكُلِّ وَجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّيَهَا ؟ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ ؟ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا يَأْتِ بِكُمُ  
اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا ؟ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ؟

(١٤٩) وَمِنْ ؟ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ؟ وَإِنَّهُ لَلْحَقُّ  
مِنْ رَبِّكَ ؟ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

(١٥٠) وَمِنْ ؟ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ؟ وَحَيْثُ مَا  
كُنْتُمْ ؟ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ ؟ شَطْرَهُ ؟ لِنَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَيْكُمْ ؟ حُجَّةٌ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ  
ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ ؟ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ ؟ وَأَخْشَوْا نِي وَلِأْتِمَّ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكُمْ ؟ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ ؟ تَهْتَدُونَ

(١٥١) كَمَا أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ سَأَلْنَا فِيكُمْ ؟ رَسُولًا ؟ مِّنْكُمْ ؟ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ ؟ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ ؟  
وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

**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; He guides him whom He likes to a straight path" (142).**

**And thus We have made you a medium nation so that you may be witnesses for the people and the Messenger may be a witness for you. And We had not made the qiblah which you had but that We might know him who follows the Messenger from him who turns back upon his heels; and though this was surely hard except for those whom Allah has guided aright; and Allah was not going to make your faith to be fruitless; most surely Allah is Affectionate, Merciful to the**

*people* (143).

*Indeed We see the turning of thy face to heaven, so We shall surely turn thee to a qiblah which thou shalt be pleased with; turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you are, turn your faces 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* (144).

*And even if you bring to those who have been given the Book every sign they would not follow your qiblah, nor can you be a follower of their qiblah, neither are they the followers of each other's qiblah; and if you follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, then you shall most surely be among the unjust* (145).

*Those whom We have given the Book recognize him as they recognize their sons; and a party of them most surely conceal the truth while they know* (it) (146).

*The truth is from your Lord, therefore you should not be of the doubters* (147).

*And every one has a direction to which he would turn; therefore, hasten to* (do) *good works; wherever you are, Allah will bring you all together; surely Allah has power over all things* (148).

*And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and surely it is the very truth from your Lord, and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do* (149).

*And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you are turn your faces towards it, so that people shall have no argument against you, except such of them as are unjust; so do not fear them, and fear Me; and so that I may complete My favour on you and that you may walk on the right course* (150).

*Even as We have sent among you a Messenger from among you who recites to you Our communications and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know* (151).

## **Commentary**

Ponder on these verses and you will find them well-connected with each other, a common context joining them together like a strand running through the beads. These verses together talk about the appointment of the Ka'bah as the *qiblah* (the direction of prayer etc.) for the Muslims.

Therefore, no attention should be paid to those who say that there was a change of sequence in the arrangement of these verses, or that some of them have abrogated the others. Although they narrate some traditions to this effect, but they do not deserve any comment because all of them go against the clear meaning of these verses.

**Qur'an: *The fools among the people will say: "What has turned them from their qiblah which they had?"***: It is the second introductory sentence for the soon-to-be-promulgated order to make the Ka'bah as the *qiblah* of the Muslims.

Also, it teaches the reply of the objection which the "fools among the people", that is, the Jews and the pagans of Mecca, were expected to raise: The Jews because of their partisanship of their own *qiblah*, Baytu '1-Maqdis; and the pagan Arabs because they were always on the look out for any new thing which they could object to.

Allah prepared the minds for change of *qiblah*, first by revealing the story of Ibrahim (a.s.) and various honours bestowed on him by Allah, as well as the honour accorded to his son, Isma'il; their prayers for the Ka'bah and Mecca, as well as for the Prophet and the Muslim group; their construction of the House and the order they received to cleanse it for the worship of Allah.

It is recognized that the change of *qiblah* from Baytu '1-Maqdis to the Ka'bah was an event of greatest religious significance, one of the most important commandments given to the Muslims after the *hijrah* of the Prophet to Medina, when the roots of Islam were firmly taking place and its knowledge and realities were being spread.

Understandably, the Jews were not going to remain silent in face of this legislation: According to their thinking this change negated one of their greatest religious prides, that is, *qiblah*; hitherto the Muslims were following them in their *qiblah*, and the Jews could claim a precedence over the Muslims in this religious symbol.

Moreover, this new legislation was a manifest advancement in the Muslims' religion – it made all of them to face a single point in their worship and other religious rites. It saved them from looking towards divergent directions – physically; and from difference of opinions – spiritually.

Facing towards the Ka'bah had rather more influence and deeper impression on the souls of the Muslims than the rules of cleanliness and invocation etc.; and their enemies, and particularly the Jews, understood it, and they resented it.

Their stories, as narrated in the Qur'an, prove that they were a nation which did not give any credence to anything in this world which was beyond the reach of the five senses. As spiritual things were not of any importance in their eyes, they used to accept the spiritual rules without any protest – they did not consider it worth arguing about.

But whenever they were given a Divine Commandment which had any connection with the physical world, which had a material form – like war, emigration, *sajdah*, polite speech etc. – they stood up against it, and opposed it very vehemently.

In short, Allah informed His Messenger what the enemies of Islam were going to say against the change

of *qiblah*, and taught him how they should be replied, how their arguments should be refuted.

**Their objection:** The first *qiblah* was prescribed by Allah for the previous prophets. Why was it changed to another House which had no such distinction? Was this change affected by the order of Allah? How could Allah contravene His Own previously ordained rule, or abrogate His Own law? (We have mentioned under the verse of “Abrogation” that the Jews do not believe in abrogation.)

Or, was it done without any order from Allah? If so, then the Muslims have deviated from the right path and have left guidance for misguidance. (This objection has not been mentioned in so many words in the Qur'an, but the suggested reply points to it.)

**Reply:** When Allah prescribes a house like the Ka'bah as *qiblah*, it is not based on any specialty of that house or stone; there is no unalterable and inseparable quality in that building which could demand that honour as a right.

Being chosen as a *qiblah* is not an inviolable and natural characteristic of any building. Every article, every building and every direction is equally capable of being selected for this purpose; and none has any especial claim for it. Everything belongs to Allah, He issues orders about it, whatever He likes, in any way He likes, and whenever He likes.

Whatever He decrees, it is for the guidance of the people, for their individual and collective good and perfection. He does not order but for guidance, and He does not guide except to the way which leads directly to their perfection and well-being.

**Qur'an: *The fools among the people will say:*** It means the Jews and the polytheists of Arabia; and that is why they have been referred to as “the people”. They have been called “fools” because their mentality was not right, and their ideas about the Divine Law were unsound. And that is what foolishness is: crookedness of mind and unsoundness of opinion.

**Qur'an: *What has turned them...*** When the verb, “*at-tawliyah*” (التَّوَلَّى) is joined to its object (without preposition), it means, to turn your face towards that thing, to keep it facing you; as Allah says: “so We shall surely turn thee to a *qiblah* which thou shalt like”.

When it is followed by the preposition 'an (عَنْ), it gives the opposite meaning, that is, to turn away from, to turn one's face from. The verse means:

What has turned them away, or turned their faces, from the *qiblah* which they were using hitherto, that is, Baytu 'l-Maqdis towards which the Prophet and the Muslims used to pray during his stay at Mecca and for a few months after his emigration to Medina.

**Qur'an: *from their qiblah:*** The *qiblah* is attributed to the Muslims, although the Jews were using it centuries before the Prophet. Obviously, their turning from their own *qiblah* looks more surprising, and gives more room for objection.

And it was for the same reason that the opening phrase says: “What has turned them”, instead of saying, “What has turned the Prophet and the Muslims.” It would not have looked objectionable in the least if they had said: “What has turned the Prophet and the Muslims from the *qiblah* of the Jews?”

**Qur'an: Say: “The East and the West belong only to Allah”:** Only these two directions were mentioned, because it is through them that all other cardinal and compound directions are fixed, like the North, the South and all the intermediate directions between any two cardinal ones.

The East and the West are relative directions which are fixed by the rising and setting of the sun and the stars; they cover all places of the earth (except two imaginary points of the true North and South Poles). Perhaps, it was for this reason that only these two were chosen to represent all the directions.

**Qur'an: He guides him whom He likes to a straight path:** The word “*sirat*” (صِرَاطٌ) = path) is mentioned here without a definite article “*al*” (ال), since it is a common noun, and does not specify a definite path, because nations differ in their paths due to their differences in ability to attain perfection and happiness.

**Qur'an: And thus We have made you a medium nation that you may be witnesses for the people and the Messenger may be a witness for you:** Apparently it means as follows: As We are going to change very soon the *qiblah* for you in order that We may guide you to a right path, in the same way We have made you an intermediary nation.

## **Relationship between Prescription of Qiblah and Ummah being Witnesses for the people and the Messenger being Witness for the Ummah**

Someone has explained it in the following way: And like this wonderful making, We have made you a medium nation. Such an explanation deserves no comment. Another explanation given by another exegete is as follows:

They were made a “medium nation” to “be witnesses for the people”. What does it mean? “Medium” is a thing in the centre, neither to this side nor to that. This “*ummah*” has the same position *vis-à-vis* the people – that is, the People of the Book and the polytheists.

The polytheists and the dualist emphasize the physical aspects of life. Their whole attention is fixed to this worldly life; their plans are centred on its trinkets and comforts. They do not believe in the Resurrection or the hereafter; spiritual perfection and esoteric virtues are not so important to them. On the other extreme are some groups, like the Christians, who put utmost emphasis on the spiritual aspects to the detriment of the physical ones.

They teach monasticism and rejection of the world. They seem heedless to the fact that the Creator has made the physical perfection a means by which man may reach the goal for which he has been created. In short the latter – the “people of spirit” – nullified their goal by nullifying the means; and the former –

the “people of body” – nullified their goal by focusing their whole attention to the means as though it was the goal in itself. Allah has made this *ummah* a “medium”, by giving them a religion which leads them to the straight and upright path, in the middle – inclined neither to this side nor to that.

It strengthens both sides – the body as well as the soul – according to what each of them needs and deserves; it is a religion which encourages and invites man to combine the virtue of both. Man is, after all, a combination of body and soul; he is neither body alone nor spirit alone. If his life is to be a happy one, he must unite physical perfections with the spiritual one.

This *ummah* then is the medium and well-balanced one; it is a criterion to judge and weigh both sides of extremes. It is, therefore, the witness for all the people who have deviated from the middle way going to this side or that. And the Prophet – the most perfect and the ideal example of this *ummah* – is the witness for this *ummah*.

The Prophet is the criterion to judge the condition of this *ummah's* individuals; and the *ummah*, in its turn, is the criterion to judge the condition of other people; it is the point to which the two extremes are expected to return.

**Comment:** What this exegete has said is true in itself, but it does not explain the wordings of this verse. The *ummah*, by virtue of its position in the middle, may be called a criterion to judge the extremes, as well as a point to which the people of the two extremes should return. But it does not make it a “witness” for the two extremes, nor it gives the *ummah* ability to observe the said extremes.

Apparently, there is no correlation between being a medium (in the above-mentioned sense) and being a witness. Also, there is no reason why the Messenger of Allah should be made a witness for them; there is no correlation between the two witnessings.

But the verse clearly says that the Messenger of Allah shall be a witness for the *ummah*, because the *ummah* shall be a witness for the people, and it shall acquire that status because it is a medium *ummah*.

Moreover, the witnessing, referred to in this verse, is one of the Qur'anic realities, which has been mentioned repeatedly in the Divine Speech; and looking at various contexts where it has been referred to, we find that its connotation differs completely from the above-quoted meaning. Allah says:

***How will it be, then, when We bring from every people a witness and bring you as a witness for these?*** (4:41);

***And on the day when We will raise up a witness out of every nation, then shall no permission be given to those who disbelieve, nor shall they be made to solicit favour*** (16:84);

***... and the Book shall be laid down and the prophets and the witnesses shall be brought up...*** (39:69).

Note that witnessing in these verses is unconditional, and the obvious meaning is that they shall be witnesses for the deeds of their nations, and will also testify that the messengers of Allah did convey the Divine Message to those nations, as is made clear in the verse:

***Most certainly then We will question those to whom (the messengers) were sent, and most certainly We will question the messengers (7:6).***

No doubt they will give the evidence in the hereafter; but they must have seen the events in this life, as may be inferred by the words of 'Isa (a.s.) quoted in the Qur'an:

***... and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst take me (away) completely, Thou were the watcher over them, and Thou art witness of all things (5:117);***

***... and on the Day of Resurrection he (i.e., 'Isa) shall be a witness against them (4:159).***

Obviously, our normal senses, with all their powers, cannot perceive except the exterior forms of deeds and actions, and that also of a thing which is present, which is within the reach. They cannot perceive a non-existent or a non-present item.

And it is completely beyond their power to know, comprehend or identify the realities of those actions and deeds; nor can they observe the immaterial ideas like belief or disbelief, and success or failure.

In short, no man can witness a thing which is hidden from the five senses, nor can he observe the esoteric ideas and characteristics that are locked into another person's heart. But it is these hidden realities which will be taken account of, and looked into, on the Day of Resurrection, as Allah says:

***... but He will call you to account for what your hearts have earned (2:225).***

Obviously, these things cannot be seen even by those who are present, let alone those who are absent. It can be done only by a man whose affairs are managed directly by Allah, and whom Allah makes to "see" the hidden realities.

This fact may be inferred from the words of Allah:

***And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth (i.e., of the reality) and they know (43:86).***

Surely, 'Isa (a.s.) is included in this exception, because, Allah has testified that he is one of those who shall bear witness (as is seen from the above-mentioned two verses). Thus, he is one of those who had "seen" the realities and known the hidden factors of the deeds of their *ummah*.

In short, the witnessing mentioned in the verse under discussion does not mean that this *ummah* follows a religion which combines physical perfection with spiritual sublimity. Certainly, this explanation has nothing to do with the meaning of "witness" nor does it fit the apparent meaning of the above-quoted



verses.

Actually, they have been called "witnesses" of the people, because they see and observe in this world the realities of the people's actions – felicity and infelicity, rejection and acceptance, submission and arrogance.

And they shall give evidence for or against those people on the Day of Judgment, the day when Allah will make every thing to testify for or against a man, not excepting his own limbs and organs; the day when the Messenger will say:

***"O my Lord! surely my people treated this Qur'an as a forsaken thing (25:30).***

Also, it is known that the whole *ummah* could not attain to this position; it is a special status given to only the pure friends of Allah. Even those who are only slightly below them in the ranks of felicity, and other just and pious believers are not included in this verse – let alone the rubble of the nation, or the Nimrods and Pharaohs of the *ummah*.

You will see in the Commentary of the verse 4:49 (***And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favours from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the good ones; and excellent are these as companions,***), that the least that can be said about the martyrs – the witnesses of the deeds – is that they are under the guardian-ship of Allah, enjoying His favours, and proceeding on the straight path. Also, it has been described in short in the explanation of the verse:

***The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours... (1:7).***

When Allah told this *ummah* that it was made witness for the people, the meaning was that the "witnesses" would be from among this *ummah*. In this respect, it is not different from those verses which tell the Children of Israel that they were made to excel over the worlds.

Such verses show that there were among the Children of Israel such personalities who were given that distinction; not that every individual of them was superior to the worlds. A distinction enjoyed by a group is attributed to the whole nation, because the group is a part of the nation.

Likewise, this *ummah* has been said to be "witnesses over the people", because there are, in this *ummah*, people who shall be witnesses of the people, and the Messenger shall be witness of them.

**Objection:** Allah says in the Qur'an:

***And (as for) those who believe in Allah and His messengers, these it is that are the truthful and the witnesses near their Lord (57: 19).***

It shows that all the believers, in general, are "the witnesses".

**Reply:** The phrase “near their Lord” proves that Allah will include them among the witnesses on the Day of Resurrection, a rank which they had not got in this life. It is like the verse which says:

**And** (as for) **those who believe and their offspring follow them in faith, We will unite with them their offspring...** (52:21).

Apart from that, this verse is general and shows that all the believers from all the nations will be witnesses near Allah; it does not speak about this *ummah* especially; therefore, it is of no use to the objector.

**Objection:** If the *ummah* has been made a “medium” in this meaning, it does not necessarily follow that the *ummah*, or a certain group among the *ummah*, should be witnesses of the people's deeds, nor that the Messenger of Allah should be witness of those witnesses. Therefore, the problem which had arisen in the previous explanation, remains unanswered even by your exegesis.

**Reply:** The verse says that those people were made witnesses because they were made a medium nation. It means that this “mediumship” is something which brings the “evidence” and “witnesses” in its wake. And Allah says:

**O you who believe! bow down and prostrate yourselves and worship your Lord, and do good that you may succeed. And strive hard in** (the way of) **Allah,** (such) **a striving as is due to Him; He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion; the faith of your father, Ibrahim; he named you Muslims before and in this, so that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and you may be witnesses for the people; therefore, establish prayer and pay zakat and hold fast to Allah; He is your Guardian; how excellent the Guardian and how excellent the Helper!** (22:77 –78).

Note that the distinction that the Messenger should be a witness for them and they should be witnesses for the people, is based on two things: First, that they were chosen by Allah; and, second, that Allah had not laid upon them any hardship in religion. Then the religion is defined as **the faith of your father, Ibrahim, who had named you Muslims before.**

He had used this name for you when he prayed to Allah on your behalf, in these words: **and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting (Muslims) to Thee.** Allah granted his prayer and made you Muslims, you have surrendered to His order and command; you neither disobey Him nor behave arrogantly before Him; that is why you feel no hardship in the religion, no rule looks difficult for you to follow. You have, therefore, been chosen by Him, and guided on the straight path, submitting to your Lord in all affairs.

We have made you like this, in order that the Messenger may be a witness for you and you may be witnesses of the people. Accordingly, you shall be a medium between the Messenger and the people; you shall be connected to the Messenger on one side and to the people on the other. In this way, the wish of Ibrahim has been fulfilled about you and the Messenger, as he had prayed:

***Our Lord! and raise up in them an Apostle from among themselves who shall recite to them Thy communications and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them*** (2: 129).

You are that Muslim *ummah*; the Messenger has transmitted the knowledge of the Book and wisdom to your hearts; and you have been purified by him. Purification has cleansed your hearts from impurities and freed it for My worship and obedience (and as mentioned earlier, it is what Islam means).

Therefore, you are the Muslims, sincere in your worship. Of course, the Messenger has precedence over you, because it is he who has guided and trained you. He has precedence over the whole *ummah*, and you are the medium group – joined to the Messenger on one side, and to the people on the other.

There are many associations at the beginning and the end of the verse which point to this meaning; one may understand them on meditation; and we shall further explain it in a proper place, Allah willing. However, the foregoing explanation shows that:

**First:** The fact that they have been made a medium *ummah* has a direct bearing on the two objectives. In other words, the facts that “you may be witnesses for the people”, and that “the Messenger may be a witness for you”, both are the direct result of their being “a medium nation”.

**Second:** They have been called a medium *ummah* because they are placed between the Messenger and the people – not because they are a medium between two extremes, or between the “people of spirit” and the “people of body”.

**Third:** The verse in its connotation has connection with the verses of the prayer of Ibrahim (a.s.); and this witnessing is a privilege of the said Muslim *ummah*.

One thing more: It appears from the Qur'an that witnessing about the deeds is not exclusively reserved for the human witnesses. Everything which has any connection with a deed – angels, time and place, religion and Book, limbs and organs, senses and hearts, for example – will testify about it.

It may be inferred from the above that the same place and limbs etc. which we have in this life will be present on the Day of Judgment. Also, it appears that all the above-mentioned things have a sort of a life and perception with which they can perceive the particulars of deeds – those particulars are imprinted on them.

It is not necessary that every life should be like our own; there is no reason why life should be of only one type. It cannot be said that because time or space does not have a life like ours, therefore, it has no life.

This topic has been mentioned here just to complete the picture. Details about each point will be given in more suitable places.

***Qur'an: And We had not made the qiblah which you had but that We might know him who follows***

***the Messenger from him who turns back upon his heels:*** The words: “We might know”, may be explained in two ways:

First: It may mean, 'My Messenger might know'. Great people generally use this style to speak on behalf of themselves and their subordinates. For example, a ruler says: 'We killed him', or, 'We imprisoned him', although it is his employees, not him–self who kill or imprison.

Second: It may refer to that knowledge of Allah which ac–companies the creation or existence of a thing, and not to that knowledge which Allah has of everything before that thing comes into being. “Turning back upon one's heels” is an allegorical expression, which denotes evasion or dissension.

When a man, who is standing, turns from one direction to another, he turns on his heels. It is like the words of Allah:

***And whoever shall turn his back to them on that day...*** (8:16).

Obviously, this verse aims to remove any possible misgivings which the believers would have had because of the change of *qiblah*: Why *qiblah* was changed? Why the previous *qiblah* was abrogated? What will happen to the prayers which they had prayed facing Baytu 'l–Maqdis?

Also, it is clear that “the *qiblah* which you had” refers to Baytu'l–Maqdis, and not to the Ka'bah (as someone has said). If his explanation is accepted, it would imply that both Baytu 'l–Maqdis and Ka'bah were prescribed as *qiblah* twice, not once. But there is nothing to support this suggestion.

However, it was but natural that the believers should feel some uneasiness because of this change.

First of all, as Allah had already decided that He would ultimately make the Ka'bah as the *qiblah* of the Muslims, then why did He make Baytu'l–Maqdis as their *qiblah* for so many years in the beginning?

The verse says that all these rules and legislations are made for the benefit of the people themselves. The laws of religion aim at training the people and perfecting them; separating the believers from others; distinguishing the obedient from the disobedient, the submissive from the arrogant. And it was for the same reason that the previous *qiblah* was prescribed for you.

It was done in order that “We might know him who follows the Messenger”, that is, We might distinguish him who follows the Messenger “from him who turns back upon his heels”. In usual way, the sentence should have said, “who follows thee”, but the Qur'an has used the noun “the Messenger” instead of pronoun, it is to remind us that his status of Messengership has a direct bearing on this separation between obedient and disobedient ones.

“We had not made the *qiblah* which you had”: That is, We had not made Baytu 'l–Maqdis as *qiblah* for you but for the reasons described.

Their second worry could be about the prayers which they had prayed facing Baytu 'l–Maqdis. What

would be its legal status, as it was prayed towards a building that was no longer valid?

Allah says that Baytu 'l-Maqdis was a valid *qiblah* as long as it was not abrogated. When Allah abrogates a rule, it loses its validity from the time of its abrogation, not from the original legislation; and it is a result of Allah's affection and mercy to the believers.

The above misgiving and its reply is inferred from the words: "and Allah was not going to make your faith to be fruitless; most surely Allah is Affectionate, Merciful to the people." "*ar-Rafah*" (الرَّافِعَةُ) and "*ar-rnhmah*" (الرَّحْمَةُ) both basically denote mercy and compassion; but the former usually has the connotation of pity for an afflicted one, while the latter is general.

**Qur'an: *Indeed We see the turning of thy face to heaven, so We shall surely turn thee to a qiblah which thou shalt be pleased with:*** The verse shows that the Messenger of Allah, before the revelation of the verse of *qiblah* – that is, this very verse – used to turn his face to heaven, as he waited – or hoped – that Allah would send some commandment regarding *qiblah*.

He did so because he wished that Allah would honour him with a *qiblah* especially prescribed for him. It does not mean that he was not pleased with Baytu'l-Maqdis as his *qiblah* – for be it from the Messenger to do so! Allah says: "We shall surely turn thee to a *qiblah* which thou shalt be pleased with." To be pleased with a thing does not necessarily mean to be displeased with its alternative.

The traditions, describing the occasion of revelation of this verse, say that the Jews reviled the Muslims and boasted against them, all because the Muslims prayed towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis – the Jews' *qiblah*. It made the Messenger of Allah sad; so he came out in the dark of the night looking towards heaven waiting for a revelation from Allah, hoping that it would cheer him up. Then this verse was revealed.

Now, suppose he would have received revelation to continue praying towards the previous *qiblah*, that is, Baytu 'l-Maqdis, it would have been his proof against the Jews that, he followed the *qiblah* by the order of Allah and not in imitation of the Jews.

The fact is that there never was, nor there ever is, anything to be ashamed of, if the Prophet and the Muslims prayed facing Baytu 'l-Maqdis, because the servant has no choice but to accept and obey the order of the Master. But the verse promulgated a new *qiblah*.

It removed the cause of the Jews' revile and boast, in addition to defining the new *qiblah*. In this way, it was doubly welcomed – it was a proof against the Jews as well as a source of pleasure for the Messenger of Allah (S).

**Qur'an: *turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you are, turn your face towards it.*** "*ash-Shatr*" (الشَّطْرُ) translated here as "towards", literally means "part of". "Part of the Sacred Mosque" refers to the Ka'bah.

Allah used this expression, instead of saying, towards the Ka'bah, or, towards the Sacred House, to keep

the new rule parallel to the previous one. They used to pray to a part of the Remote Mosque, that is, its well-known Rock; so it was changed to a part of the Sacred Mosque, that is, the Ka'bah.

It is quite apart from the fact that the addition of the word, "part of" to "the Mosque" and its qualification with the adjective "Sacred" gives many details of this legislation which would have been lost if this phrase were changed to "the Ka'bah" or "the Sacred House".

Allah begins this verse by giving the order personally to His Messenger (***turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque***), and ends it by including all the Muslims in it (***and wherever you are, turn your face towards it***).

It supports the traditions that the *qiblah* was changed when the Messenger of Allah (S) was praying and the Muslims were praying behind him. There-fore, he was personally told to turn towards the Ka'bah during that prayer; then the verse went on describing a general order which covered him and all the Muslims, for every time and in every place.

***Qur'an: and those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord:*** Their Book contains the prophecies showing the truth of the prophethood of Muhammad (S), or that this True Prophet would pray facing to-wards the Sacred Mosque.

In any case, the verse shows that the Jews' Book had some verses which confirmed – explicitly or implicitly – the truth of this legislation; ***and Allah is not at all heedless of what they do***; He knows how they hide the truth and conceal the knowledge which they had been given.

***Qur'an: And even if you bring to those who have been given the Book every sign they would not follow your qiblah:*** The verse rebukes them for their obstinacy and stubbornness. Their refusal is not because truth is hidden from them.

No, they know very well that it is the truth – they have no doubt about it. Yet they create mischief and invent objection after objection, because they hate the religion and reject the truth. No proof would satisfy them; no sign would make them change their attitude.

Even if you bring to them every sign they would not follow your *qiblah*, because they are obstinate and refuse to accept the truth; ***nor can you be a follower of their qiblah***, because you have a clear proof from your Lord.

This Qur'anic sentence may also be interpreted as a prohibition given in the form of a proposition. ***Neither are they the followers of each other's qiblah.*** The Jews face towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis wherever they may be; and the Christians face towards the East wherever they may be.

Neither the former would follow the *qiblah*, of the latter, nor the latter would accept the *qiblah* of the former – because all of them follow their own desires.

Qur'an: and if you follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, then you shall most surely be among the unjust: The admonition (in singular pronoun) is addressed to the Prophet, but it is really meant for his ummah. It also indicates that the Jews, in their recalcitrance, follow their desire and have become unjust.

**Qur'an: *Those whom We have given the Book recognize him as they recognize their sons:*** The pronoun "him" refers to the Messenger of Allah, not to "the Book"; the simile, "as they recognize their sons", fits recognition of a man, not of a book.

Nobody says: He recognizes this book as he recognizes his son. Moreover, the subject of the speech is the Messenger of Allah and the revelation he received regarding the *qiblah*, it has nothing to do with the Book which was given to the People of the Book.

The verse says: The People of the Book recognize the Messenger of Allah by the prophecies which their Book contains, ***as they recognize their sons, and a party of them most surely conceal the truth while they know (it).***

The previous verses were addressed to the Prophet (in second person singular pronouns); then in this verse he has been mentioned in third person, and the talk is addressed to the believers; then the next verse again reverts to the previous style and is addressed to the Prophet. The style was changed here to show that the truth of the Prophet was clear and well-known to the People of the Book.

This change reminds one of a speaker who is talking before a group, one of whom surpasses all in virtues and excellence. The speaker, therefore, addresses him especially (in recognition of his excellence), although the talk is meant for the whole group.

Then for some reason, he wants to describe the virtues and excellence of that person; now he turns towards the audience and treats him as absent, mentioning him by pronouns of third person. When that topic is finished, he again assumes the previous style of addressing him directly.

**Qur'an: *The truth is from your Lord, therefore you should not be of the doubters:*** It emphasizes the preceding statement and strongly interdicts doubting. The talk in singular pronouns is addressed to the Prophet but is actually intended for the *ummah*.

**Qur'an: *And every one has a direction to which he would turn; therefore, hasten to (do) good work:*** '*al-Wijhah*' (الْوَجْهَةُ) on paradigm of, as well as synonymous to, *al-qiblah* (الْقِبْلَةُ), has the same meaning 'that to which one faces'.

The verse sums up the foregoing statements and draws their attention to another more important reality. Every nation has its own *qiblah*, pre-scribed for them according to their own needs and atmosphere.

Being *qiblah* is not an inherent and inseparable characteristic of any place or direction; it is not a natural or personal feature of a thing which could not be changed. It is therefore not good for you to waste your

time and energy in disputation and argumentation about it.

You should rather hasten to do good work and try to excel others in virtuous deeds; Allah is surely going to gather you on a day about which there is no doubt; and ***wherever you are, Allah will bring you all together; surely Allah has power over all things.***

This verse is applicable to the subject of *qiblah*, as it comes between the verses dealing with that subject. Also, it may be applied to the creative affairs as it points to the Divine Measure and Decree and to the related legislation. We shall explain this topic, Allah willing, in another place.

***Qur'an: And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque:***

According to some exegetes it means: And from any place you come forth and at any place you come down, turn your face to the Sacred Mosque. Others say that it means: And from whatever town you come out.

The phrase, "from whatsoever place you come forth", literally means as follows: 'from whatsoever place thou halt come forth'. Possibly it may refer to Mecca from which the Messenger of Allah (S) had to come out, as Allah says:

***... the town of thine which has driven thee out...*** (47:13 ).

However, the, verse says that the law to face the Ka'bah is a firm order which you have to observe in Mecca as well as in other towns and places. Then Allah emphasizes it in these words: ***and surely it is the very truth from your Lord, and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do.***

***Qur'an: And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you are turn your faces towards it:*** The first sentence is repeated here word by word, to show that this law is to be followed in every condition.

For example, one says: Fear Allah when you stand up; fear Allah when you sit down; fear Allah when you speak; fear Allah when you are silent.

The speaker wants to emphasize that you should fear Allah in all conditions and in every situation. This point would be lost if the above sentence were reconstructed in the following way: Fear Allah when you stand up, when you sit down, when you speak, and when you are silent.

The meaning is as follows: Face towards the Sacred Mosque of Mecca whence you had to come out, and wherever you happen to be in the world, turn your faces towards it.

***Qur'an: so that people shall have no argument against you, except such of them as are unjust; so do not fear them, and fear Me; and so that I may complete My favour on you and that you may walk on the right course:*** These sentences describe the following three benefits of this commandment, and at the same time put the utmost emphasis on obeying this law:



**First:** The Jews knew from their books that the promised Prophet would face towards the Ka'bah, turning away from Baytu 'l-Maqdis, as Allah has pointed to this fact in a foregoing verse,

***and those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord*** (2: 144).

If the *qiblah* were not changed, the Jews could have used it as a proof against the Muslims that the Prophet was not the one whose advent was foretold in \_ the previous books. But now the promulgation of this order has not left them any room for disputation – except those of them who are unjust.

This exception gives the following meaning: Of course, those of them who are unjust – because they follow their desire – will never be satisfied; they will continue arguing against it; “so do not fear them”, because they are unjust and they follow their desires – and Allah does not guide aright the unjust people – “and fear Me”.

**Second:** Obedience of this rule will lead the Muslims to the completion of Divine favour on them, by perfecting their religion. We shall explain the meaning of the “completion of favour”, when we write the verse:

***This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion*** (5:4).

**Third:** There is the hope that through this rule the Muslims will be guided to the straight path. We have explained the meaning of guidance under the verse: *Guide us to the straight path* (1:5).

An exegete has written:

“The verse of *qiblah* contains the words, 'and so that I may complete My favour on you and that you may walk on the right course'. Similar words have been used in the 'Chapter of Victory', while mentioning the victory of Mecca:

***Surely We have given to you a clear victory, so that Allah may forgive you your (i.e., your ummah their) past faults and those to follow and complete His favour to you and keep you on a straight path*** (48: 1–2).

This almost identical expression shows that the verse of *qiblah* too alludes to the victory of Mecca.”

According to that exegete, “the Ka'bah in the beginning of Islam was occupied by the idols, which were put there by the polytheists – the power in those days was in the hands of the pagans. Islam was weak, it had no authority or power.

There-fore, Allah told the Prophet to face towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis, the *qiblah* of the Jews, who were nearer than the polytheists, to Islam. Then the Prophet emigrated to Medina, and Islam began to gain strength.

The time was coming nearer when Mecca would be conquered and the House of Allah cleansed of the idols' pollution. Allah therefore ordered the Prophet to change the direction of *qiblah*. It was a great bounty favour which Allah has reserved for the Muslims.

And Allah gave a promise, included in this verse of *qiblah*, that He would complete His favour on them and guide them to the right course. It was implied in these words that the Ka'bah would soon be cleansed of the idols and images; the Muslims would be exclusively connected to the Ka'bah as it would remain exclusively under their care.

This verse actually gave the good tidings of the conquest of Mecca. Thereafter, when Mecca was conquered, Allah reminded them of that promise by using almost similar words in its description:

***“... and complete His favours to you and keep you on a straight path.”***

**Comment:** This explanation, although apparently well-founded, is in fact not based on deep reflection; because the words of the Qur'an do not support it. How do we know that the verse of *qiblah* contains a promise to complete the favour? The answer is: Because of li (لِ) a preposition used here for the final cause; so that, in order that) in *li-utimma* (لِئْتِمَّ) = *so that I may complete...*

And the verse in Chapter 48 (Victory), which, according to him, was revealed in fulfilment of that promise, also begins with the same proposition:

***so that Allah may forgive you your (i.e., your ummah their) past faults and those to follow and complete His favour to you and keep you on a straight path*** (48:2).

Clearly, both verses contain the same promise to complete the favour in future; neither gives the good news of its fulfilment yet. Moreover, the verse of *qiblah* gives this promise to all the Muslims while that of the Victory uses singular pronouns and is addressed to the Prophet personally. Clearly they have been revealed in different contexts.

If there is any verse showing the fulfilment of the promise given in both these verses, then it can only be the verse:

***This day I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion*** (5:3).

We shall explain the meaning of *an-ni'mah* (الْنِعْمَةُ) = favour, bounty, blessing) in the explanation of this verse, and there we shall describe what was the favour and bounty that was completed on that day, and by which Allah has put the Muslims under His obligation for ever.

There are two other verses which, like the above-mentioned two, contain the promise of completion of favour;

**but He wishes to purify you and that He may complete His favour on you so that you may be grateful (5:6);**

**even thus does He complete His favour upon you, that haply you may submit (16:81).**

We shall write under these verses somethings related to this topic.

**Qur'an: Even as We have sent among you a Messenger from among you who recites to you Our communications and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know:** The verse begins with the word *kama* (كَمَا) = like, as, even as), which is obviously a compound of *ka* (كَ) = like, as) and *ma* (مَا) which changes the verb into *masdar*.

The connotation, therefore, is as follows: 'We have bestowed Our favours on you by appointing the Ka'bah as your *qiblah*. It is the House that Ibrahim built, and he prayed to Us for its good and blessings.

We have done this in the same way as We have favoured you by sending to you a Messenger from among you who recites to you Our communications and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and purifies you. We did so in answer to the pleading of Ibrahim, when he and his son, Isma'il, prayed to Us:

**Our Lord! and raise up in them a Messenger from among themselves, who shall recite to them Thy communications and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them.'**

This verse, in short, says that it was Allah's favour on this *ummah* that he sent the Prophet among them, as it was a favour to appoint the Ka'bah as their *qiblah*.

Who are the people referred to by the second person pro-nouns in "among you a Messenger from among you"? The application may be restricted or extended, depending on the level of explanation whether it is interpreted esoterically, literally or legislatively.

Esoterically, it is addressed especially to the earlier mentioned: **Submissive group** (2:128), that is, those who were given authority over religion and followers of religion; literally all the Muslims from the progeny of Isma'il (i.e., the Arabs of Mudar tribe) are included; legislatively, it covers all the Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs alike.

**Qur'an: recites to you Our communications:** "al-Ayat" (آيَاتُ) = verses, signs – translated here as communications) obviously refers to the verses of the Qur'an, because it is the words (not the meanings) that are recited; 'at-tazkiyah" (التَّزْكِيَةُ) = to purify) is to remove dirt, filth and blemish.

The Prophet cleansed them thoroughly – from wrong beliefs like polytheism and rejection of true faith, from vile and base character like pride and avarice, and from evil and immoral actions and things like murder, fornication and intoxicants.

**Qur'an: and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know:**

It encompasses all primary and secondary aspects of religious knowledge.

These verses have variously changed the pronouns used for Allah, using third and first persons, singular and plural; and for others, using first, second and third persons. The reason of every such change may be understood by a little meditation.

## Traditions

Al-Qummi narrates in his *at-Tafsir* that as-Sadiq (a.s.) said about the words of Allah, ***The fools among the people will say...***: “The *qiblah* was changed to the Ka'bah after the Prophet prayed towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis for thirteen years in Mecca; and (also) after his emigration to Medina he prayed towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis for seven months.” (He said:) “Then Allah turned him towards Mecca.

And it was because the Jews used to revile the Messenger of Allah (S), saying that he was their follower (as) he prayed to their *qiblah*. The Messenger of Allah (S) became very sad because of it; and he came out in the middle of the night looking to the horizons of the heaven, waiting for an order in this regard from Allah.

When it was day and the time of the noon prayer arrived, (the Prophet, S) was in the mosque of Banu Salim. And he had (already) prayed two *rak'ahs* of *zuhr*, when Jibril came down; and he held the Prophet's upper arms and turned him towards the Ka'bah.

And he brought down to him (the revelation): ***Indeed We see the turning of thy face to heaven, so We shall surely turn thee to a qiblah which thou shalt like; turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque.***

Thus, the Prophet had prayed two *rak'ahs* towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis, and (prayed the remaining) two *rak'ahs* towards the Ka'bah. Then the Jews and the fools said: ***'What has turned them from their qiblah which they had?'*** ” (*Majma'u 'l-bayan* )

**The author says:** There are numerous traditions of similar meaning narrated by the Sunni and Shi'ah narrators, which are recorded in the books of traditions. The reports differ about the time when the *qiblah* was changed.

Most of them say that it happened in the month of *Rajab* in the second year of *hijrah* – the seventeenth month after the emigration; and this timing looks more correct. Allah willing, we shall describe some other related topics in a separate discourse.

There are traditions from Sunni narrators, which explain the witnessing of this *ummah* concerning the people and the witnessing of the Prophet for them, in these terms: “The nations will deny, on the Day of Judgment, that the prophets had conveyed any message to them.

Then Allah will ask the prophets to bring their proof that they had really conveyed the message – and Allah knows it better. So, the *ummah* of Muhammad (s. a. w. a.) will be brought in and they will testify (for the prophets).

Then the (other) nations will say: 'How do you know?'

They will say: 'We knew it from the information which Allah revealed in His Book on the tongue of His truthful Prophet.' Then Muhammad (S) will be brought there and he will be asked about the condition of his *ummah*. So he will testify for their purity, justice and probity. And this is the meaning of the words of Allah:

***How will it be, then, when We bring from every people a witness and bring you as a witness for these?*** (4:41)

**The author says:** This theme is supported by other traditions narrated by as-Suyuti in *ad-Durru 'l-manthur* and others. But how is it that the Prophet would testify about his *ummah* that they were pure and just?

It can be accepted only if it is taken to mean that he will testify for a selected group, not for the whole *ummah*. Otherwise, such traditions have to be rejected, as is self-evident from the Qur'an and the *sunnah*.

How can the Prophet sanction or approve all those oppressions, cruelties, tyrannies and massacres perpetrated by this *ummah*, and whose like was never seen in any of the previous nations? How can he testify that all those Pharaohs and *taghuts* of this *ummah* were pure, just and upright?

What is this tradition, if not a calumny against this up-right religion? A joke with the realities of this illustrious faith? Moreover, it is based on the wrong idea that a hearsay testimony is acceptable!

The correct meaning of the verse may be seen in a tradition narrated from al-Baqir (a.s.) that he said: "Only the Imams and the Messengers will be witnesses for the people. And as for the (general) *ummah*, it is unthinkable that Allah would call them as witnesses – and there are among them those whose testimony is not accepted for a bundle of vegetable." (*al-Manaqib* )

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said about the verse, ***that you may be witnesses...***: "(It is) then (wrong) if you think that Allah in this verse means all the monotheists, the people of *qiblah* (*i.e.*, the Muslims). Do you think that a person whose evidence is not acceptable in this world about a *as-sa'* (أَلْمَاعُ = a weight about 3 kilogram) of date, Allah will call him as a witness on the Day of Judgment and will accept his evidence in presence of all the previous nations?

Certainly not. Allah does not mean (here) such of his creatures; He means only that *ummah* in which the prayer of Ibrahim was granted;

***you are the best ummah raised up for the*** (benefit of) ***men*** (3:110);

and they are the medium *ummah* and they are the best *ummah* raised up for the men.” (al – 'Ayyashi )

The author says: We have described it under that verse with the help of the Qur'an itself.

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) narrates from his father, from the Prophet, that he said: “It is among the (bounties) which Allah gave to my *ummah* and (by which) He made them excel all other nations, that He gave them three attributes which (previously) were not given but to a prophet...

And when He sent a prophet, made him a witness for his nation; and surely Allah, Blessed and High is He, has made my *ummah* a witness for the creatures, as He says:

***so that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and you may be witnesses for the people*** (22:78). (*Qurbu 'l-asnad*)

**The author says:** This *hadith* is not in conflict with the above explanation, because the word *ummah* refers to that *submissive ummah* in which the prayer of Ibrahim (a.s.) was accepted.

Amiru 'l-mu'minin (a.s.) says, *inter alia*, in a *hadith* describing the Day of Judgment: “They will gather in a place where every one will be required to speak; (but) no one shall speak:

***except he whom the Beneficent Allah permits and who speaks the right thing*** (78:38).

Then the Messenger shall be asked to stand (and speak); and that is (the meaning of) His word to Muhammad (S):

***How will it be, then, when We bring from every people a witness and bring you as a witness for these?*** (4:41).

And he is the witness of the witnesses, and the witnesses are the Messengers.” (al-'Ayyashi)

Abu Basir, narrating from the fifth or the sixth Imam, says: “I said to him: 'Did (Allah) order him (i.e., the Prophet, s.a.w. a.) to pray towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis?' He said: 'Yes. Don't you see that Allah, Blessed and High is He!, says:

***And We had not made the qiblah which you had but that We might distinguish him who follows the Messenger from him who turns back upon his heels...'***” (*at-Tahdhib*)

**The author says:** This *hadith* shows that the words: *which you had*, are related to: *the qiblah*, and that the whole phrase refers to Baytu 'l-Maqdis; and it was the *qiblah* which the Messenger of Allah (S) had. As we have mentioned earlier, this explanation is in conformity with the context. Also, it supports what has been narrated in a *hadith* from al-'Askari (a.s.):

“The Meccans were attached to the Ka'bah. Therefore Allah wished to distinguish the followers of Muhammad (S), from his opponents, by following the *qiblah* which he disliked. And because the people of Medina were inclined towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis, He ordered them to go against it and to turn towards the Ka'bah, in order that He may show who follows Muhammad (S) (even) in that which is not to his liking; such a man, then, believes in his truth and agrees with him... ”

It also shows the incorrectness of the interpretation, to which we had made a passing reference in the \$\$\$SUB[-Commentary] Commentary, and which runs as follows: The phrase, ***which you had, is the second object of the verb, We had not made.*** Accordingly, the verse means: And We did not make the *qiblah*, that is, the Ka'bah, which you had before Baytu 'l-Maqdis.

In support of this interpretation, they quote the words, ***but that We might distinguish him who follows the Messenger from him who turns back upon his heels.*** The absurdity of this interpretation and of this argument is self-evident.

Az-Zubayri, narrating from as-Sadiq (a.s.) says: “I asked him: 'Will you not tell me about the faith, whether it is word with deed or (only) word without deed?' He said: 'The faith is deed, all of it; and (utterance of) the word is one of those deeds; (it is) obligatory from Allah, described in His Book; its light is clear, its proof well-established; the Book bears witness for it and calls to it.

And when Allah turned his Prophet towards the Ka'bah, away from Baytu 'l-Maqdis, the Muslims said to the Prophet: “What do you see (about) our prayers which we used to pray towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis? What shall be our position about these? And what shall be the position of those of us who have passed away and they were praying towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis?”

Then Allah revealed (the verse):

***and Allah was not going to make your faith to be fruitless; most surely Allah is Affectionate, Merciful to the people.***

Thus Allah named the prayer as “faith”.

Whoever therefore fears Allah, guarding his limbs (from sins), fulfilling (obligation of) each of these limbs which Allah has laid down for it, he shall meet Allah with perfect faith, (and he shall be) from the people of the Garden. And whoever acted falsely about any of these (limbs), or transgressed what Allah had ordered about it, he shall meet Allah (as one) having an in-complete faith.' ” (al-'Ayyashi )

**The author says:** It has been narrated also by al-Kulayni. Although it says that the verse, *and Allah was not going to make your faith fruitless...*, was revealed after the *qiblah* was changed, yet it does not go against the explanation given in the Commentary.

“The Prophet prayed towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis for thirteen years in Mecca, and nineteen months in Medina.<sup>1</sup> Then the Jews reviled him, saying: 'You are a follower of our *qiblah*.' He was very much

saddened because of it.

Then one night he came out turning his face towards the horizons of the heaven. When it was morning, he prayed the dawn (prayer). Then when he had prayed two *rak'ahs* of *zuhr*, Jibril came and told him (the message of Allah):

***Indeed We see the turning of thy face to heaven, so We shall surely turn thee to a qiblah which thou shalt like...;***

then he took hold of the Prophet and turned him towards the Ka'bah, and those who were (praying) behind him turned their faces (likewise), until the men stood in place of the women, and the women in place of the men.

Thus, the early part of his prayer was towards Baytu '1-Maqdis, and the latter part towards the Ka'bah. Then the news reached another mosque in Medina, and its people had already prayed two *rak'ahs* of *'asr* (to Baytu '1-Maqdis), and they turned towards the (new) *qiblah*.

So the early part of their prayer was to Baytu '1-Maqdis and the latter part towards the Ka'bah; so that mosque was named the Mosque of the Two Qiblahs.” (*al-Faqih*)

**The author says:** al-Qummi has narrated a similar *hadith*, with one variation that the Prophet was in the mosque of Banu. Salim.

Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) said explaining the words of Allah, *turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque:* “Face towards the *qiblah*, and do not turn away from the *qiblah*; otherwise your prayer will be void. For, Allah says to His Prophet concerning the obligatory prayer, ***turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you are, turn your face towards it.***” (al-'Ayyashi)

**The author says:** There are numerous *al-mustafidah*<sup>2</sup> traditions which say that this verse was revealed about the obligatory prayer.

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said about the verse: ***Those whom We have given the Book recognize him as they recognize their sons:*** “This verse was revealed about the Jews and the Christians. Allah, Blessed and High is He! says:

***Those whom We have given the Book recognize him,*** that is, recognize the Messenger of Allah (S), as they recognize their sons. For, surely Allah, Mighty and Great is He!, had revealed to them, in the Torah and the Injil and Zabur, the attributes of Muhammad (S), and the attributes of his companions, as well as (the story of) his emigration.

And this is (the meaning of) the words of Allah:

***Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are severe against the unbelievers,***



***compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Torah and their description in the Injil...*** (48:29).

And this was the description of the Messenger of Allah (S) and of his companions in the Torah. Thereafter, when Allah raised him up, the People of the Book recognized him. (But they rejected him) as Allah, Great is His Majesty!, says:

***but when there came to them that which they did recognize, they disbelieved in him*** (2:89).

(al-Qummi)

**The author says:** A similar *hadith* has been narrated in *al-Kafi* from 'Ali (a.s.). Many Shiite traditions say that the words of Allah, ***wherever you are, Allah will bring you all together***, has been revealed about the companions of al-Qa'im (a.s.). Some of those traditions say that it is applied to them according to the principle of the "flow of the Qur'an".

A tradition, narrated by the Sunni narrators says that 'Ali (a.s.) said about the words of Allah, ***so that I may complete My favour on you***: Completion of favour is the death in the state of Islam (i.e., to die as a Muslim)." Another Sunni *hadith* says that the completion of favour is entering into the Garden.

## **An Academic and Historical Discourse on Ways of Finding the Direction of Qiblah**

The Muslims have to face towards the *qiblah* in prayer – and it is an act of worship which each of them has to perform several times a day – and at the time of slaughtering an animal as well as at some other times. It compelled the Muslims to find out the direction of the *qiblah* wherever they might be.

In the beginning it was based on guess and rough estimates. Then the overwhelming need prompted the Muslim geographers and mathematicians to devise more accurate methods to find its direction.

They based their reckoning on the longitude and latitude of a place – they calculated the degree of inclination between its location and that of Mecca with the help of trigonometry and astronomy. They fixed the direction of *qiblah* in every town with the help of the well-known Indian Circle which fixed the meridian of a place and showed the degree of its inclination from the *qiblah*.

Then they started using the compass. Its hands pointed to the North and the South; and if the degree of inclination to Mecca was known beforehand, it was easy to fix the direction of the *qiblah*. It gradually replaced the Indian Circle, being a lot quicker and easier to use.

But both these endeavours of theirs – may Allah reward them for these – were not free from defect and miscalculation.

**First: The Indian Circle:** The latter geographers found out that the early scholars were not very accurate in their calculation of the longitude – and this had led to confusion in calculation of the degree of inclination, and consequently in the fixing of the *qiblah's* direction. The early scholars were more accurate in finding the latitude of a place, than its longitude.

They used to fix the latitude of a place by measuring the altitude of the North Pole there. But fixing a longitude depended on measuring the distance between two places, and it was done by noting the time when a certain celestial event, like a solar or lunar eclipse, occurred in one place, and then calculating as to how much time had elapsed before it appeared in the other place.

Obviously, neither the old instruments were dependable enough, nor the means of communications fast enough, to give this calculation the desired accuracy.

With advancement of scientific apparatus and development of new means of communication, the need was felt to find a more accurate way of fixing the *qiblah*. The well-known scholar, Shaykh (Haydar Quli) Sardar Kabuli – Allah's mercy be on him!

Looked into this matter, and calculated the inclination of various places with the help of the modern sciences. He wrote on this subject his book *Tuhfatu 'l-ajillah fi ma'rifati 'l-qiblah*. It is a fine work, in which he explains scientifically, how to find out the direction of *qiblah* for a place; also he has given charts fixing the *qiblah* of various towns.

Allah helped him in his endeavour – may He reward him for it – in such a fine way that his calculations showed a clear miracle of the Prophet.

When the early Muslim scholars calculated the position of Medina, they found that it was situated at 25°n lat. 75° 20' long. The trouble was that *al-mihrab* ( الْمِحْرَابُ ) = niche) of the Mosque of the Prophet (based on the original direction) was not exactly to the direction which the newly calculated position was indicating. The religious scholars were always arguing on this subject, and they invented some reasons to justify that “deviation”, although none was based on reality.

But Sardar Kabuli – may Allah have mercy on him! – showed clearly that Medina is situated on 24°57' lat. 39°59' long.; and that the inclination towards Mecca is 0°45'. And the niche of the Prophet's Mosque has exactly the same inclination.

By this calculation, one more miracle of the Prophet came to light; it was the direction to which he turned his face while he was praying, and about which he later said that Jibril took hold of his hand and turned him towards the Ka'bah. Truth was what Allah and His Messenger said.

After him, came the great mathematician, 'Abdu 'r-Razzaq al-Bagha'iri – Allah's mercy be on him – and he calculated the direction of the *qiblah* of most of the towns of the world, and published it in his book; his charts fix the *qiblah* of more than 1,500 towns. In this way, the favour of Allah was completed about

the direction of the *qiblah*.

**Second: The Compass:** It has been established that the Earth's magnetic Poles are not identical with its geographical Poles. First of all, the magnetic Poles have been changing from time to time.

Second, the magnetic North Pole is at a distance of about one thousand miles from the geographical North Pole. Obviously, the compass does not show the exact direction of the *qiblah*; in some places the deviation may reach a degree that cannot be allowed.

Now, the leading mathematician, Husayn 'Ali Razm Ara, undertook these days (i.e., the 1332nd year of the solar hijri calendar) to solve this problem. He calculated the difference between the magnetic and geographical Poles at various places, and determined the degrees of inclination of the *qiblah* from the magnetic Pole in respect of about one thousand towns. Then he invented his compass which fixes the *qiblah* of those places very accurately.

This compass is now in general use in the Muslim world. May Allah reward him for his endeavours.

## **A Sociological Essay on the meaning of Qiblah and its Benefits**

Let us look at the social structure of humanity. Ponder on society *per se*, and you will admit that it was the human nature which brought it into being and developed it with its many-sided aspects.

It did so because of the inspiration it received from Allah – the divinely-gifted instinct which made a man realize that he depends on collective efforts of other men for his survival and development. That is why human beings rely on society and keep their activities within the bounds of the social laws.

Then he acquired knowledge – mental images – related to his surrounding matter, and about his own needs and activities. What creates a relation – positive or negative – between a man and his activities is the knowledge of their various properties; like the knowledge that something is good or bad, this should be done, that should be avoided. In fact, all the fundamental concepts of sociology come under this category.

It covers leader-ship and subordination, ownership and jurisdiction, collective and individual affairs, and in short, all the common rules and values as well as the national or tribal traditions and customs.

Even the last mentioned rites which change from nation to nation, from region to region and from era to era, have been produced by the human nature which worked according to the divinely-bestowed instinct.

All these exoteric aspects of society are symbols of esoteric ideas and ideals; human nature sees in them fulfilment of its inner craving, and thus moves towards it in appropriate way – by taking it, discarding it, doing it, leaving it or perfecting it.

Now, Allah is free from matter and its concomitants; He can never be perceived by any physical sense. How can people turn towards Him, especially if they want their inner devotion manifested in their actions – because actions are confined within material limits.

It can only be done by representing the esoteric ideas with manifest actions. Various feelings and emotions are represented with various appropriate physical postures: Man prostrates to show his self-abasement; and bows down to glorify the Creator.

Circumambulation around the Ka'bah represents self-sacrifice. Standing in prayer portrays the Creator's greatness, and *wudu'* and ritual bath are intended to make one spiritually clean, to prepare oneself for Divine Presence.

Undoubtedly, complete attention towards God during the prayer is the soul of the worship. Without total undiverted attention worship has no life, no vitality. And the attention depends on such representations for its existence, continuation and perfection.

The worshippers of idols, celestial bodies or other material things (like trees, animals and/or human beings) stand face to face with their deities and idols, turning towards them with their bodies maintaining close proximity with them.<sup>3</sup>

Islam came to verify the previous religions brought by the prophets; it is the most comprehensive and complete Divine Religion. It has appointed the Ka'bah as the *qiblah* – the direction to which people should turn during prayer (and no one is excused from prayer in any condition) wherever they may be in the world.

They are further obliged (or encouraged) to turn towards it in certain conditions, and forbidden to face it or keep it behind their backs in some other conditions. Thus, a Muslim is obliged to keep his attention to the House of Allah.

He is not to forget his Lord in private or in public, in his working hours or in sleep, while standing up or sitting down in prayer, or in other actions – not even in his meanest condition.<sup>4</sup>

The above discourse looked at the benefits which an individual derives from the *qiblah*. If we ponder on this rule from sociological point of view, then its effects are even more important and far-reaching. It has united all the Muslims – of diverse places and different times – fixing their attention to one point.

The *qiblah*, therefore, portrays that they are one in their belief, connected to each other in their social structure, and brothers in Islam. If such a fine spirit permeates the material and ideological lives of the individuals and groups, the society shall reach its highest point of perfection; and the most comprehensive and all-encompassing unity shall manifest itself in the Muslim society.

Allah has especially bestowed this favour on His Muslim servants. By this favour He has protected their religious unity – even now when they have fallen apart in so many groups, have been divided into so

many sects and are following so many diverse ideologies.

We are thankful to Allah for His favours.

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1. The Prophet emigrated to Medina in the month of Rabi'u1-awwal. The nineteenth month after hijrah was Ramadan of the second year. (tr.)

2. al-Mustafidah (المُسْتَفِيضَةُ) = A tradition narrated by a great many narrators, but to a degree less than that required for mutawatir. (tr.)

3. But that method, invented by human mind, was rejected by Divine religions brought by the prophets of God, because instead of fixing the attention to God, it actually diverted the attention towards those idols etc., making them into partners of God in worship.

Yet, the original aim – a physical manifestation of undiverted attention towards God – was good and in conformity with demands of the human nature, provided it could be achieved without any risk of falling into polytheism. (tr.)

4. It is unlawful to face towards the qiblah, or to keep the qiblah on backside, while urinating or relieving the bowels. Therefore, a Muslim has to remember the direction of qiblah even at that time. (tr.)

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