

Chapter 3: Prophet's (S) debate with Jews

Imam Hassan Askari (as) said: ‘When Prophet (S) was living in Mecca, God’s order was such that while offering his prayers, he should face *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas* [the holy al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem] and when possible, keep *Kaaba* [the Holy *Kaaba*] in between the *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas* and Mecca and when this was not possible, keep *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas* as *Qibla* [direction to which Muslims turn for their prayers] and this routine continued for 13 years.

When Prophet (S) migrated to Medina, he would still face *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas*, while praying [a direction] that deviated from *Kaaba*, and this continued for about 16 or 17 months.

After seeing this, extremist and mischievous Jews¹ said that how strange it is that Muhammad (S) faces our *Qibla* while praying and he has adopted our ways and style in his prayers.

When the Prophet (S) found out about what the Jews had been saying, he was hurt and severely grieved; it bothered him to pray while facing their *Qibla* and he wished to make *Kaaba* his *Qibla*. As soon as he wished this, Jibreel came to him.

The Prophet (S) said to Jibreel: “If God changed *Qibla* from *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas* to *Kaaba*, I would be very pleased because it hurts me to hear what the Jews are saying about praying while facing their *Qibla*.”

Jibreel [a] replied: ‘Oh Prophet of God! Ask God for changing the *Qibla* and I am sure that God will not reject your wish and request.’ Upon hearing this, the Prophet (S) prayed to God. As soon as he prayed, Jibreel went to Heavens and returned immediately. **He said:** ‘Oh Muhammad (S)! Recite this:

Indeed We see the turning of your face to heaven, so We shall surely turn you to a qibla 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.

And even if you bring to those who have been given the Book every sign they would not follow your qibla, nor can you be a follower of their qibla, neither are they the followers of each other's

qibla, and if you follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, then you shall most surely be among the unjust. [2: 144–145]²

Upon hearing this, the Jews said: ‘Why did Muslims stop facing their previous *Qibla* [*Bayt-ul-Muqaddas*] and turned to *Kaaba*?’

God gave a perfect answer to this question and the Prophet (S) said:

The fools among the people will say: What has turned them from their qibla which they had? Say: The East and the West belong only to Allah; He guides whom He likes to the right path. [2: 142].

And He is all-aware of the interests of His servants, and it is He who will send His obedient servants to gardens of bliss.”³

Imam Hassan Askari (as) said: ‘Then, some Jews came to the Prophet (S) and started talking: ‘O Muhammad! You prayed while facing the *Qibla* you call *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas* for 14 years and now you suddenly left it so can we ask you a question: Were you following *haq* [righteous way, truth] before and now you have left it and started following *batil* [erroneous way, wrong, against *haq*] or were you following *batil* before for a period of time and now you have come to follow *haq*?’

The Prophet (S) said: “I was on *haq* before and I am on *haq* now as well because God’s clear command is that the east and the west are His and He guides whoever He wishes to the right path.

Oh servants of God! When Allah felt that your interest and welfare lies in praying while facing the east, He ordered you to make east your *Qibla* and when He saw that your interest and welfare lies in making the west as your *Qibla*, He ordered you to face the west. Hence, do not interfere in divine plans for His servants and His will for your interest”

The Prophet (S) then continued: “Now you tell me, you stopped working on Saturdays and then you worked on all the days. Then again you stopped working on Saturdays and then you again worked on all the days. Now tell me, did you come towards *batil* from *haq* or from *batil* towards *haq* or from *batil* towards *batil* or from *haq* towards *haq*? Explain in any way you wish. Then our answer will be the same as yours.”

The Jews said: ‘Yes, our ‘*tark al-amal*’ [leaving daily work for earning] on Saturdays was *haq* and our working afterwards was also *haq*.’

The Prophet (S) said: “So, this is exactly our situation. It was *haq* at that time when *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas* was made the *Qibla*. Then, the decision to make *Kaaba* the new *Qibla* at that time was also *haq*.”

The Jews said: ‘Has *bada*⁴ (change) occurred in Lord when He ordered you to turn your face from *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas* towards *Kaaba* while praying?’

The Prophet (S) said: “This change in the *Qibla* cannot lead to *bada* in God. The truth is that He is aware of all the consequences. He is omnipotent over the advantages and benefits [of His orders]. He cannot make mistakes nor can anyone change His decisions. God is higher over all these things.”

Then the Prophet said to them: “Oh Jews! Tell me, does not God give a person a disease and then cure him? And He cures him and does He not give him an incurable disease? Is this *bada* for God? And is it not so that God gives life and takes it away? Does this lead to *bada* for God?”

The Jews replied: ‘No.’

The Prophet (S) said: “Then just like this, God’s Prophet Muhammad (S) prayed facing the *Kaaba* while before, he used to pray facing *Bayt-ul-Muqaddas*. So, no *bada* occurred by His first order [so that there would be the necessity to give a new order] but that what happened was the need of time and the need of time changes in every era.”

He (S) continued: “Does not God bring winter after summer and summer after winter and does this change in seasons manifest *bada* in God’s decision?”

The Jews said: ‘No.’

The Prophet (S) said: “Then similarly, no *bada* occurred with the change of *Qibla*.”

He (S) then said: “Has not God ordered us to wear thick and warm clothes in winter to protect ourselves from cold and in summer, to protect our bodies from the heat of summer? Then, wasn’t the order given in summer against the order given in winter? So is this contradiction tantamount to *bada*?”

The Jews replied: ‘No.’

The Prophet (S) said: “Similarly, God gives you an order and it is in your interests. Then, at another time, He gives you a different order while keeping in view your interests. And then, when you will obey Him in both the situations, you will deserve His reward.”

Then he (S) said: “Oh servants of God! Think this way as if you are sick and the Lord of the world is your physician. So, the interest and welfare of the patients lies in acting upon the advice of physician. And not in considering the patients’ desires and fulfilling their wants. Thus, submit to Allah’s orders so that you will be among those who are successful.”

Reference: *al-Ihtajaj*, vol. 1, p. 81–86 [written by al-Allama Abu Mansur Ahmed Ibn Ali al-Tabarsi. d. 599 A.H.]

1. Three tribes of Jews lived in strong forts in Medina at that time: Banu Qurayza, Banu Nudhayr and Banu Qaynqa'. They were bitter enemies of Prophet Muhammad (S) and Muslims. They broke their pledge with Prophet (S) and started a

campaign of propaganda and insult against Prophet (S) and Muslims. They conspired to kill Prophet (S) and Muslims and waged war against Muslims either directly or indirectly by supporting other tribes. Ultimately, all these three tribes were banished from Medina. For more details see the book, The Message, by Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani available at: <http://www.al-islam.org/message/> [1]

2. For exegesis of these ayahs, please see Tafsir al-Mizan available online at: <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> [2]
See under verse 2: 144

3. Related verses of Holy Qur'an:

And thus We have made you a medium (just) nation that you may be the bearers of witness to the people and (that) the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you; and We did not make that which you would have to be the qibla but that We might distinguish him who follows the Messenger from him who turns back upon his heels, and 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 [2-143].

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. 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 accusation against you, except such of them as are unjust; so do not fear them, and fear Me, that I may complete My favor on you and that you may walk on the right course [2: 149-150].

4. Please see glossary for more details.

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