

Chapter 3: What Is Sacred To Muslims?

3.1 The Holy Mosque in Makkah

While the primary function of a mosque is as a place of worship, mosques are also centers for learning and charity – in addition to being the place of the community's social, cultural and political activity.

Over 4,000 years ago, the Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) and his son Ismail (a.s.) built the Ka"bah – lit. 'cube' in the Arabic language – for the worship of Allah, and this now stands at the centre of the Holy Mosque in Makkah. Wherever they might be, all Muslims align themselves to face in the direction of the Ka"bah when they offer prayer and it is thus, for Muslims worldwide, the most revered place of worship in the world.

It is believed that the Ka"bah, constructed of stone blocks, was erected on the original site of a sanctuary established by the first Prophet, Adam (a.s.). Embedded in the corner of the structure is the foundation stone initially used by Ibrahim a meteorite that is referred to as the 'Black Stone'.

The city of Makkah lies in the Valley of Ibrahim, located within a rugged landscape of granite rocks, some as high as 300 metres (1,000 feet) above sea level. To the North lie the *Al-Falaq* and *Qu'aqi'an* mountains, to the South the *Abu Hudaidah* range, to the West the *Kuday* and to the South and South-East the *Abu Qubais* and *Khindimah*.

There are three main entrances to Makkah: *Al-Mu"allat* (also known as *Al-Hujoon*), as well as *Al-Musfalah* and *Al-Shubaikah*. It is generally agreed that *Al-Mu"allat* serves those areas that are higher than the Holy Sanctuary, and *Al-Musfalah* those that are lower.

Qur'anic references to the Ka bah

And remember Ibrahim's (a.s.) plea:

O Lord, make this land secure and shield me and my children from idol worship. O Lord, idols have led many astray, so those who follow [my faith] are truly of me, and for those who disobey

me – You are truly the oft-forgiving the merciful.

My Lord, in order to establish prayer there, I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near Your sacred house. Please, incline people's hearts towards them, and grant them fruitful sustenance so that they have reason to be grateful. (Qur'an 14:35–37)

Recall that when Ibrahim (a.s.) and Ismail (a.s.) were raising the foundations of this house [they prayed], 'O All-Knowing, All-hearing Lord, accept this labor from us.' (Qur'an 2: 127)

When We confirmed to Ibrahim the place for this house [We said]:

Do not associate anything with Me, and keep My house clean for people to walk round – stand before – and bow down and prostrate.

Now make the [duty of] pilgrimage known and call upon people to come to you on foot, and on beasts made lean by travel from far distant places. (Qur'an 22:26, 27)

So that the Quraish remain secure and safe during their winter and summer journeys, empower them to worship the Sustainer of this house who has granted them food against hunger and safety in the face of danger. (Qur'an 106: 1–4)

3.2 History of the Holy Mosque

Over the years, the pagans of the Arab peninsula forgot the message of Ibrahim and filled the Kaabah with idols – some say with as many as 365.

As de facto custodians of the Kaabah, the pagan Quraish tribe, who resided in Makkah, promoted pilgrimage to the then idolatrous 'holy site' for the undoubted commercial benefits that this brought.

After the Prophet Muhammad's (S) peaceful reconquest of Makkah in the year 8 AH/630 CE, the Kaabah was purified of idols. Ahmad ibn Hanbal narrates in his Musnad and al-Nissa'i in his *Khasais* that the Prophet (S) asked Ali (a.s.) to kneel down so that he could stand on Ali's (a.s.) shoulders to reach the roof of the Kaabah. However, as Ali (a.s.) felt himself to be an inadequate support for the Holy Prophet of God, it was Ali (a.s.) who stood on the Prophet's shoulders to complete the purification process. Once the Kaabah had been cleansed, pilgrimage was made an obligatory once-in-a-lifetime duty for Muslims who can afford it, and worship was redirected to Allah – Creator and sole Divinity.

At that time, the Holy Mosque consisted of an open circular space of some 2,000 square metres (21,528 sq ft). Throughout history, successive Islamic regimes have striven to dignify and honour this most Holy of mosques. This matter of extreme pride has been – and still is – considered their greatest and most treasured responsibility. Thus, over the centuries, the Holy Mosque in Makkah has been extended many times.

Regarding the change of Qiblah from Jerusalem to Makkah

When the Prophet Muhammad (S) prayed for the first time in the Holy Mosque, together with his wife Khadijah (a.s.) and cousin Ali (a.s.), they faced in the direction of Jerusalem. After his migration to Madinah, he continued to face Jerusalem until the following ayat was revealed:

As We see your face turning to the heavens [for guidance], We shall direct you towards a qiblah that will please you. So turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque – and face in its direction wherever you may be. (Qur'an 2: 144)

At the time of this revelation, the Prophet Muhammad (S) was visiting the village of the small 'Bani Saleem' clan. There, he and his companions offered Salat al-Dhurr facing Jerusalem – but after the above revelation came down, they faced in the direction of the Sacred Mosque in Makkah to offer Salat al-Asr. As the result, this 'Bani Saleem' mosque, on the outskirts of Madinah, has become known as 'The Mosque with Two Qiblahs' – and it is today still visited by pilgrims on Hajj and Umrah. It is remarkable that the Prophet .with no map or geometrical instruments to indicate the direction of Makkah from that mosque, was nonetheless able to turn to face in the precise direction of Makkah.

Prior to this change, the Jews of Madinah had teased Muslims that they had no option other than to face this Holy Jewish site.

The significance of Makkah itself

I swear by the existence of the fig, the olive, Mount Sinai and this secured city [Makkah], that We indeed created human beings in the most excellent of moulds; yet diminish them to the lowliest form – except for those who believe and perform commendable deeds that merit endless recompense. Who can then refute this 'Moral Law', is not Allah the Most Just Arbitrator?(Qur'an 95: 1-8)

In the above Surah, Makkah is referred to as 'The Secured City' – *Al-Balad al-Amin* – to indicate that immunity is granted to all who seek refuge within the Holy Mosque at its centre, even in circumstances in which this is done to evade prosecution. However, many scholars argue that for justice to be served, those in charge should prevent relatives and friends bringing food to the mosque so as to encourage such people's departure.

However, on the 1st Muharram 1400 A.H , after the 1979 Hajj season – when a gentleman called Al-Utaibi declared himself the Mahdi and his followers urged those inside the mosque to pay allegiance to him – the authorities of the Hijaz invited a Special French Rapid Response Force to enter the sacred mosque in armoured vehicles and hunt him down.

3.3 The Divine Final Scripture (the Qur'an)

The Prophet Muhammad (S), invited the whole of humanity to Islam. In presenting the matchlessness of the Qur'an as proof of his prophethood, he challenged the Arabs to produce its like, as individuals or in collaboration with one another. He later reduced the degree of difficulty of his challenge to the composition of ten, and later, to only one surah like it¹.

Arab society clearly expected those renowned for eloquence and oratory among them to rise to this direct challenge to their ability, reputation and status – for the duty to negate the proof submitted by the Prophet had clearly been directed at them.

However, reflection on the eloquence of the Qur'an led such acclaimed Arabs to concede that they could not replicate the matchless content of the Qur'an. Hence, some of them believed the 'Caller to the Truth' and accepted the call of the Qur'an. However, there were others who chose rather to for sake eloquent words and counter his claim by force of arms.

While the prophecies of earlier prophets were limited to their own times – Divine Wisdom decreeing their miracles be of short duration – in the case of the Eternal *Shariah*, the miracle that attests to its truthfulness remains its timelessness. For if the validity of this miracle had been limited, it would not have been meaningful to those distanced from it by location or time.

It was the Qur'an that enlightened the hearts of those who had been devoted to idols, tribal warfare and pre-Islamic vainglory. It was the Qur'an that disposed them to kindness and empathy towards each other and to for sake those who rejected faith. Hence, by virtue of Islam, Muslims became the cohesive and convincing group that attracted others to their faith.

Many *ayat* in the Qur'an deal with the essential issues of theology and ascribe attributes of perfection appropriate to Allah Almighty's prestige – and exalt Him beyond the effects of deficiency and contingency. No other Divine Scripture deals with these issues in such a precise manner.

Vis-a-vis monotheism

They [unbelievers] say: God has taken to Himself a son, be He glorified. No, whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His. All are subservient to Him – the 'Originator' of the heavens and the earth! When He decrees a thing, he only says 'Be' and it is. (Qur'an 2: 116-7)

Your God is One God; there is no Divinity save Him, The Merciful, The Compassionate. (Qur'an 2: 163)

Allah, there is no Divinity save Him, The Ever-living, The Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. (Qur'an 2:255)

Nothing in the earth or in the heavens is hidden from Allah. It is He who fashions you in the womb as He pleases. There is no Divinity save Him, The All-Mighty, The Wise. (Qur'an 3:5-6)

Such is Allah your Lord. There is no Divinity save Him, the Creator of all things, worship Him for He tends everything. Vision comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all. He is The Subtle, The Aware. (Qur'an 6: 102-3)

Say, Allah produces creation, then reproduces it. How, then, are you misled? (Qur'an 10:34)

It is Allah who raised up the heavens without visible support, then mounted the Throne and compelled the sun and the moon to be of service. Each runs to an appointed term, and it is He who orders their course. He details the revelation that you may be certain of the meeting with your Lord. (Qur'an 13:2)

It is clear from the above examples that the Qur'an describes the Creator of the Universe in a manner that accords with reason. For it would not have been possible for an unlettered person, who grew up in an environment of ignorance, to bring forth such distinguished knowledge.

Vis-a-Vis Prophethood

Qur'anic references to prophets confirm their excellent virtues and accord them the status appropriate to their sanctified station of prophethood and Divine Deputyship:

Those who follow the Messenger; the Prophet; the unlettered one; the one whom they find mentioned in the Torah and Injil, he commands them to do good; forbids them to commit evil acts; makes all pure and good things lawful for them; and all things foul and filthy unlawful.. (Qur'an 7: 157)

It is He, who sent among the unlettered ones, a Messenger of their own, to recite to them His Revelations and teach them the Book and Wisdom ... (Qur'an 62:2)

Thus, did We show Ibrahim (a.s.) the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certainty. (Qur'an 6:6)

We bestowed upon him [Ibrahim (a.s.)] Ishaq (a.s.) and Yarkob (a.s.), each one of them We guided, and Nuh (a.s.) we guided before this, and of his seed we guided Dawud (a.s.) and Sulayman (a.s.) and Ayub (a.s.) and Yusuf (a.s.) and Musa (a.s.) and Harun (a.s.). Thus, do we reward the good. And Zakaria (a.s.) and Yahya (a.s.) and Isa (a.s.) and Ilias (a.s.), each of them was of the righteous. And Ismail (a.s.) and Al-Yasa (a.s.) and Yunus (a.s.) and Lut (a.s.). Each one of them did We prefer above Our creatures, with some of their forefathers and their offspring and their brethren. We chose them and guided them to The Straight Path. (Qur'an 6:84-87)

These are of the seed of Adam to whom Allah showed favor from among the prophets, and of

those whom We carried in the ship with Nuh (a.s.), and of the seed of Ibrahim (a.s.) and Isma'il (a.s.), and from among those whom We guided and chose. When the revelations of the All-Merciful were recited to them, they prostrated in respect and wept. (Qur'an 19:58)

While the above *ayat* refer to the holiness and righteousness of prophets that accords with their position as role models for their communities, the sacred book of Christianity and Judaism, in marked contrast, portrays some prophets in rather unflattering terms – for example:

II Samuel

1:11–16 David has the Amalekite killed – who had brought Saul's crown and bracelet to him after acquiescing in Saul's request to slay him.

II Samuel

David commits adultery with Bathsheba (wife of Uriah the Hittite):

11:2 ...he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful.

11:3 David sent someone to enquire ...'This is Bathsheba ...the wife of Uriah the Hittite.'

11:4 So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. [Now she was purifying herself after her period.] Then she returned to her house.

11:5 The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'

11:6 So David sent word to Joab (commander of his army), 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.'

In 11:7–13 David encouraged Uriah to go home to his wife, but Uriah felt it not right for him to go home to eat and drink and lie with his wife while his comrades were camping in the fields and still in danger.

11:14 David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it to him by the hand of Uriah.

11:15 In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.'

11:16 As Joab was besieging the city [Rabbah], he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew their most valiant warriors would be.

11:17 ...Uriah was killed as well.

11:27 When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and she bore him a son.

I Kings

11:3–10 David [and Bathsheba's] son Solomon – who had 700 royal wives and 300 concubines – did not in old age remain wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord. He followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Phoenicians [NRSV Bible – Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians]; and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites, built a shrine for Chemoth, the abomination of Moab etc., and the gods of all his strange wives.

Socio-ethical teachings of the Qur'an

The Qur'anic legislative system and its teaching is rational. The Qur'an advocates justice in the clearest manner possible.

Vis-a-Vis justice

Allah commands that you return all valuables held in your care and that if you pass judgement on anyone, you do so with justice. (Qur'an 4:58)

Deal justly, that is closest to your duty. (Qur'an 5:8)

If you give your word, keep true to it, even if that may be to the detriment of a kinsman. (Qur'an 6:152)

Allah enjoins you to justice and kindness and to give to kinsfolk, but forbids lewdness, abomination and wickedness. He exhorts you to take heed. (Qur'an 16:90)

Vis-a-Vis The condemnation of miserliness

Let not those who hoard what Allah has bestowed from His bounty think that doing so is better for them. No, it is far worse, for what they hoard will prove a burdensome yoke for them to bear on the Day of Resurrection ... (Qur'an 3:180)

On the other hand, the Qur'an condemns extravagance and squandering:

Do not be spend thrift for Allah loves not those who are extravagant or wasteful. (Qur'an 6:141)

Those who squander wealth are brothers of the devil. (Qur'an 17:27)

Do not be miserly and worthy of reproach, nor so generous that you become destitute. (Qur'an 17:29)

Vis-a-Vis Qur'anic evidence and scientific fact

Some matters that the Qur'an informs people about were unknown until later advancements in scientific learning and discovery. For example, everything in the earth has its own specific weight:

We have spread out the earth with stabilizing mountains and caused everything to grow on it in proper measure.. (Qur'an 15:19)

Well before scientists discovered that each element has a specific atomic weight, the above ayah could not be fully understood or made sense of.

Among the unknown things that the Qur'an disclosed 14 centuries ago is the existence of other continents. In this respect, Allah Almighty declares,

[Allah] Lord of the two Easts and Lord of the two Wests. (Qur'an 55:17)

This *ayah* perplexed Qur'anic scholars for many centuries. Numerous interpretations were proposed – that the ayah refers to where the sun and the moon rise and set – or that it refers to seasonal changes in the rising and setting angles of the sun and moon. However, in the light of current scientific knowledge, this *ayah* is clearly seen to allude to the existence of another continent – on the other side of the earth – where the rising of the sun corresponds to its setting on this side.

This is clear from the following *ayah*:

Until he comes to us he will say [to Shaytan]' I wish there was the distance of the two Easts between you and me.' (Qur'an 43:38)

i.e. the furthest distance possible, namely at the other side of the world.

Another unknown thing to which the Qur'an refers is the fact that the earth is round:

Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and Lord of the sun's risings. (Qur'an 37:5)

This ayah indicates that the sun rises and sets over the earth at more than one point, and this cannot be understood other than by the earth being a rotating sphere. That the rising of the sun over any part of the globe coincides with its setting over the other is also mentioned in other Qur'anic references:

I swear by the Lord of the Easts and the Wests that We are able to replace them with better people. (Qur'an 70:40-41)

We conclude that the Qur'an is the eternal miracle and the strongest proof that this final Divine scripture was Allah's revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (S). It follows that every statement contained within it is sacred. Although it is the content of the Qur'an that is sacred, Muslims treat the physical book with the deference due to its content. They do not permit it to be exposed to anything that might be construed to be disrespectful. One *Shariah* ruling concerning the Qur'an is that no one who is not in a state of ritual cleanliness is permitted to touch its script. This is based upon the *ayah*,

It is truly an honourable scripture from a safeguarded source, and none may touch it without

having been thoroughly purified. (Qur'an 56:77-79)

3.4 Muhammad – Guide and Exemplar

The value and validity of received information relates, not only to the relevance of the authority of its source, but also to the credibility and integrity of those who convey it. The Prophet of Islam could not have successfully invited others to comport themselves in a manner that he himself was unfamiliar with. This applies equally to the error-free Imams J. who followed him, for they too needed to be seen to evidence the behavior that they advocated.

The characteristics of Allah's final Messenger described in the Holy Qur'an are:

1. That Muhammad (S) is a Messenger – this is emphasized in many ayat, for example: ***Muhammad (S) is only a Messenger, other messengers have passed away before him. (Qur'an 3:144)***

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2. That obedience to Muhammad (S) reflects obedience to Allah:

The Messenger himself drew no benefit or authority from people hearing the message he was sent to deliver. The benefit, and the authority invested in him, is derived solely from the authoritative source of the message that was revealed to him (S):

O you who believe, obey Allah and obey His messenger and those vested with authority over you, and then, if you really believe in Allah and the last day, refer your disputes to Allah and His Messenger. (Qur'an 4:59)

Those who obey the Messenger, indeed obey Allah. (Qur'an 4:80)

3. That ten characteristics are attributed to Muhammad (S):

Those who follow the Messenger [1]; the Prophet [2]; the unlettered one [3]; the one whom they find mentioned in the Torah and Injil[4]; he commands that they do good [5];forbids them to commit evil acts [6];makes all pure and good things lawful for them [7];and all things foul and filthy unlawful [8]; and relieves the yoke of burdens upon them [9]; thus, those who believe in him honor him, help him and follow the light sent with him [to] achieve success and salvation. (Qur'an 7: 157)

4. That he (S) invites you to a life of enlightenment:

O you who believe, respond to Allah and to His Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life ... (Qur'an 8:24)

5. That he (S) is an excellent exemplar:

Truly, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent exemplar ... (Qur'an 33:21)

6. That being softly spoken in his presence is a sign of piety:

O you who believe, do not raise your voices above that of the Prophet...truly, those whose hearts have attained piety speak softly in the presence of Allah's Messenger. (Qur'an 49:2-3)

7. That previous Messengers gave glad tidings of his coming:

Isa (a.s.), the son of Maryam, said, O children of Isra'il, truly I am Allah's Messenger - assigned to confirm the Torah sent before me, and to transmit the good news that a Messenger named Ahmad (S) is to come after me ... (Qur'an 61:6)

8. That he (S) has been delegated to bear witness for all communities:

Deeds that communities and individuals commit in this temporary life are to be judged on the Day of Resurrection. The objective of each Messenger has been to guide their community to the 'Right Path'. Although they fulfilled their assignments, not everyone has adhered to their teachings. So should any plead that they did not receive a message, and as such, were unaware of what was expected of them, the need for reliable witnesses arises:

What will they do when We bring witnesses from each community, with you [Muhammad(S)] to be a witness against these people? (Qur'an 4:41)

On the day when We raise up in each community a witness against them, We shall bring you [Muhammad(S)] as a witness against them ... (Qur'an 16:89)

9. That He is a Mercy for the whole Universe:

It was only as a mercy for the worlds that We sent you. (Qur'an 21: 107)

10. That His message is addressed to the whole of humankind:

We have sent you to convey good news and to be a Warner for the whole of humankind. (Qur'an 34:28)

The above-mentioned points summarize the personality of the Prophet Muhammad (S)– the one sent to guide the whole of humankind towards light, mercy, justice and every good quality. He is venerated by all Muslims.

3.5 Acts of Devotion

There are many reports in *Al Sihah al-Sittah* – the six major Sunni reference books on ahadith of the Holy Prophet – that the pillars of Islam are five:

1. *Salah* (five daily prescribed times for worship)
2. Fasting during the month of Ramadhan
3. Payment of *zakah*
4. Pilgrimage during the Hajj season
5. Declarations that there is no divinity but Allah, and Muhammad (S) is His Messenger²

However, the Shiah source this information in Kulayni's *al-Kafi* that the Prophet said, 'Islam is established upon five pillars':

1. *Salah* (the daily five prescribed times for worship)
2. Fasting during the month of Ramadhan
3. Payment of *zakah*
4. Pilgrimage during the Hajj season
5. *Wilayah* – the guardianship of the faith by error-free Leaders whom believers love and turn to for guidance³

When we compare these two sources, it is apparent that all Muslims agree on the significance that acts of devotion, such as Prayer, Fasting, payment of *zakah* and Pilgrimage, have with regard to faith commitment. Without these 'acts of devotion' faith would be worthless.

In many *ahadith*, the acceptance of good deeds hinges upon prayer also being accepted – if that aspect is rejected, all others are too.

To summarize the significance of daily devotional prayer:

1. It improves communications with The Lord.
2. It is able to be offered individually as well as in congregation.
3. It is considered to be the 'instrument' by which believers ascend to the spiritual realm.
4. It is not regarded as a duty but rather as a confirmatory aspect of submission to the Almighty.

All the above and the details of how to pray and what is to be recited during the prayer are explained in chapter 9 of this book.

¹. See Qur'an 7:88; 52:34; 11:13; 2:23; and 10:38.

². Sahih Bukhari, Chapter of Faith, Vol. 1, p. 9.

[3.](#) Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, p.15; Wassal'il al-Shi'ah, Vol. 1, First chapter, Tradition No. 1.

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