

Section 17

Part Two [1](#)

[Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 142](#)

سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَّاهُمْ عَن قِبَلَتِهِمُ الَّتِي كَانُوا عَلَيْهَا قُلْ لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

142. "The fools among the people will say: 'What has turned them from their Qiblah (direction of prayer) which they were facing at.' Say: 'Allah's is the East and the West; He guides whoever He pleases to a straight way'."

[Occasion of the Change of Qiblah](#)

This verse together with a few verses following it refers to one of the great happenings in the history of Islam which caused a huge wave of excitement among the people of that time.

The explanation for the occurrence is that the Prophet of Islam (S), under divine direction, prayed towards the direction of Jerusalem for thirteen years in Mecca after proclaiming his mission and then, also, for several months in Medina after his migration.

But again, under divine direction, the Qiblah (i.e. the direction of prayer) was changed and Muslims were commissioned to pray towards the Ka'bah.

The commentators are divided as to the length of time that Muslims worshipped facing towards Jerusalem in Medina. The duration of this ritual situation has been cited from seven to seventeen months. However, during this period, Muslims were always entangled with the reproaches of the Jews, because Jerusalem was originally the Jewish Qiblah.

Since the Muslims used to pray towards the direction of Jerusalem, the Jewish Qiblah, during that time, they blamed that their (Muslims) acceptance of their (Jewish) Qiblah proved, as they thought, that the Jews were right in their creed and Muslims, who were not independent for themselves in the direction of prayer, were not.

These statements were difficult for the Prophet of Islam (S) and Muslims to bear. They were, on one hand, showing obedience to the command of Allah, and, on the other hand, the ceaseless sarcasm of the Jews was intolerable.

It was for this reason that by night Prophet Muhammad (S) occasionally turned his face towards the heavens in a way that showed he was expecting to receive Divine revelation.

After some time of waiting, finally the command for changing the Qiblah was revealed. It was while the Prophet (S) was praying the noon prayer and he had already performed only two rak'ats of the prayer in Bani-Salim Mosque towards the direction of Jerusalem when Gabriel was commissioned by Allah to take the arm of the Prophet (S) and turn his face towards the direction of the Ka'bah.

The Jews were annoyed with this occurrence and according to their old traditional style, they began seeking pretexts. Aforetime, they used to say that they were superior to Muslims because Muslims were dependent on the Jews regarding their Qiblah. But, when the command of changing the Qiblah was sent down by the Lord, a party of the Jews protested; as the Qur'an says:

"The fools among the people will say: 'What has turned them from their Qiblah (direction of prayer) which they were facing at?'"

The Jews disputed about why the Muslims altered the former prophets' Qiblah that day. They said if the first Qiblah was correct, then why the change? And, if the second one was right, then why had they been praying towards the direction of Jerusalem for more than thirteen years?

The Lord ordered His Apostle thus:

"...Say: 'Allah's is the East and the West; He guides whoever He pleases to a straight way'."

Similar to this circumstance the words East and West, besides the verse under discussion, have occurred in four other verses of the Qur'an: 2: 115, 2: 177, 26: 28, 73: 9. There is a short explanation about their objective meaning when commenting on verse 115 (pg. 267 this vol.).

The content meaning of these terms refers to the Omnipresence of *Allah* as the Absolute Reality, the hold of which penetrates the universe in its every part and particle as well as its whole meaning both the rise of the light in the East and its setting in the West are the various aspects of manifestation of *Allah's* Might and Glory i.e. whichever direction the mind turns there is this aspect of His.

This verse was a decisive clear reasonable answer for those who sought pretext by letting them know

that Jerusalem the Ka'bah and all other places belong to *Allah*, and, intrinsically, *Allah* has no house and no place; He is the Omnipresent.

The main principle here is that we servants should submit to His command and whatever direction He appoints for prayer that direction is sacred and respectable and that direction should be prayed towards. Without His commission, no place has excellence or preference in its own essence.

And, the change of the Qiblah, in fact, is one stage of the many different stages of trial and development, each of which is an example of Divine Guidance. It is He Who guides people to the 'Straight Path'.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 143

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضَيِّعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَوُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

143. "And thus have We made you an Ummat of middling stand that you may be witnesses over mankind, and the Messenger may be (as) witness over you. We did not make the (former) Qiblah (direction of prayer) towards which you were facing at, except that We might distinguish him who follows the Messenger from him who turns back upon his heels; it was indeed hard except for those whom Allah has guided. Allah would never let your Faith be wasted -truly Allah is to mankind Most Affectionate, Most Merciful."

An Ummat of Middle Standing

In this verse a part of the philosophy and secret of the change of the Qiblah is referred to. At first it says:

"And thus have We made you an Ummat of middling stand..."

A nation that is a medium one from any aspect, viz. it is in a state that is neither in excess nor defects and can be brought forth as an example.

But, why is the Muslims' Qiblah a middle one? Haply, it is because most of the Christians were living in countries west of their Qiblah. In order to stand towards the direction of the birthplace of Jesus which was located in Jerusalem they had to stand nearly towards the direction of the East.

Therefore the East was considered the direction of their Qiblah. The Jews, who mostly were living in Syria, Babylon and the like, prayed towards Jerusalem which was located nearly in the West for them. Hence, the West was considered the direction of their Qiblah.

But, for the Muslims of that time (Muslims in Medina); the Ka'bah was located in the South, between the

East and the West which, thereby, was considered a middle ground.

All of those meanings, in fact, are understood from the phrase /wakaḥalika/ 'and thus' stated in the verse. The Qur'an, however, apparently, may intend to refer to the position of all Islamic programs and that not only the Muslims' Qiblah is middle standing but also in all other aspects they have this speciality.

Then, it adds:

"...that you may be witnesses over mankind, and the Messenger may be (as) witness over you..."

The expression of the Muslims being 'witnesses' over the people of the world, and the Prophet (S) bearing 'witness' over the Muslims may be an insinuation to 'being as a model', since witnesses are always chosen from the eligible ones. Thus, the purpose might be that you (Muslims), with these instructions and this creed, are a model nation, as the Prophet (S) is a model among you.

You, by your deeds and behaviour bear witness that a man can be both a man of action and a man of religion while he is living in this very world. He, being sociable, can quite properly protect the limits of his spiritual and moral aspects.

Portraying these thoughts and activities, you bear witness that not only there is no contradiction between religion and science, or the present world and the coming world, but they serve one another.

Then, the Qur'an has pointed to one of the secrets of the change of the Qiblah when it says:

"...We did not make the (former) Qiblah (direction of prayer) towards which you were facing at, except that We might distinguish him who follows the Messenger from him who turns back upon his heels;..."

It is interesting that the Qur'an does not say: 'him who follows you' but it says: 'him who follows the Messenger' which confirms the fact that you (Muhammad) are commissioned by the Lord and you are a guide, so, they must be obedient to your command in all things.

In this relation, the change of the Qiblah is simple; if the command were beyond that, it should be obeyed and their seeking pretext in it is a sign of their holding on to the customs of the age of paganism and idol worshipping.

The Qur'anic phrase ***"from him who turns back upon his heels"*** which originally means 'to turn on one's heel' is a hint to a kind of retrograde manner or retrogression.

"...it was indeed hard except for those whom Allah has guided..."

Yes, the soul of absolute submission to the command of *Allah* will not come to being unless there is Divine Guidance. This is an important matter that one ought to be so submissive that he does not feel in his self even the slightest heaviness for the execution of such commandments; on the contrary, because

it is from *Allah*, he embraces it willingly and eagerly.

Since the seductive enemies or the ignorant friends thought that with the change of the Qiblah our services would become futile and our reward be wasted, at the end of the verse it says:

"...Allah would never let your Faith be wasted –truly Allah is to mankind Most Affectionate, Most Merciful,"

Allah's commandments are issued as prescriptions for the purpose of our remedy; then one day this one is useful and the next, something else. Each of them in its proper place is the best to provide our felicity, prosperity, and development.

Thus, the change of the Qiblah should not create any anxiety for you about your former prayers and worshipping nor those in the future, because all of them have been right and proper.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 144

قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا
وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ

144. "Indeed We see turning your face (O' Muhammad) to the heavens, and now We shall turn you (in prayer) to a Qiblah that you shall be pleased with. Turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it (for prayer) and those who have been given the (earlier) Book know well that it is the truth from their Lord. And Allah is not at all heedless of what they do."

Turn Towards the Sacred Mosque

As it was mentioned before, Jerusalem was the first, but temporary, Qiblah of the Muslims.

So, as the Prophet (S) was waiting to receive the command from Allah to change the Qiblah, especially after he had migrated to Medina and continued praying towards the same direction, i.e. towards the direction of Jerusalem, the Jews used to very frequently taunt the Muslims at not having a Qiblah of their own and stated that but for the Jews' faith, the holy Prophet (S) would not even know the direction towards which, by the direction of Allah, he should turn in prayer.

Owing to the sneers of the Jews he (S) desired a change and Allah granted it to him. In the above verse this subject is referred to when the command of the Qiblah has been issued to the Prophet (S). It says thus:

"Indeed We see turning your face (O' Muhammad) to the heavens..."

"...and now We shall turn you (in prayer) to a Qiblah that you shall be pleased with..."

"...Turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque..."

"...and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it (for prayer)..."

According to the Islamic traditions, we know that this change of the Qiblah happened in Medina, at a very sensitive moment when the Prophet (S) was praying the noontime prayer.

The bringer of Divine revelation took Muhammad's (S) arm and turned him from the direction of Jerusalem to the direction of the Ka'bah. At the same time Muslims immediately changed their rows, too.

It is also said that in that event even the women had to change their place of prayer with the men. (It should be noted that in that occurrence Jerusalem was located approximately towards the North while the direction of the Ka'bah was towards the South.)

It is also noteworthy that the change of the Qiblah had been one of the signs of the Call of the Prophet of Islam (S) written in the former scriptures. The Jews had learnt therein that he (S) would pray towards two directions for his Qiblah.

Therefore, in the above verse, after the command of the Qiblah, it adds:

"...and those who have been given the (earlier) Book know well that it is the truth from their Lord..."

The phrase ***"those who have been given the (earlier) book"*** means the Jews who through the prophecies in their scriptures (Vide Deut 18: 15 & 18) already knew that the holy Prophet Muhammad (S) was a true prophet, thus:

"The Lord, thy God, will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren like unto Me; unto him you shall hearken:" Deut 18: 15.

"I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." Deut 18: 18,19

Moreover, the Prophet of Islam (S) did not follow the customs of his locale at first, and put aside the Ka'bah which was the center of idols that the Arabs loved very much. He formally accepted the direction of the Qiblah of a limited minority, i.e. Jerusalem. This was, in itself, considered proof of the rightfulness of his invitation and the Divinity of his Call.

At the end of the verse, it adds:

"...And Allah is not at all heedless of what they do,"

That is, instead of introducing the change of the Qiblah as a sign of his rightfulness, they rejected it and

raised a tumult. But *Allah* is heedless neither of their actions nor of their intentions.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 145

وَلَئِنْ أَتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ مَّا تَبِعُوا قِبْلَتَكَ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَتَهُمْ وَمَا بَعْضُهُمْ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَةَ بَعْضٍ وَلَئِنْ اتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِنَّكَ إِذًا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

145. "And even if you were to bring every Sign to those who have been given the (earlier) Book, they would not follow your Qiblah, nor would 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 will surely be of the Unjust."

They will Never be Content!

Commenting on the previous verse it was described that the 'People of the Book' knew that the change of the Qiblah from the direction of Jerusalem to the direction of the Sacred Mosque not only was not an objection to the authenticity of the Prophet of Islam (S), but that it was one of the signs of his rightfulness to prophethood, because they had learned through their religious books that the Apostle of Islam (S) would pray towards the directions of two Qiblahs. But their vain religious fanaticism did not let them accept the fact.

In principle, until when a person has not made a decision on a subject yet, by bringing proof, reasons, logic, and miracles for him, he might be made to understand the fact or the fact, itself, might be proved and be manifested to him and consequently, he changes his belief.

But, when formerly he has decidedly confirmed his position, especially in the case of a zealous or ignorant person, it is not at all possible to change his mind.

So the Qur'an decisively says:

"And even if you were to bring every Sign to those who have been given the (earlier) Book, they would not follow your Qiblah..."

Therefore, do not tire yourself, for they will never surrender to the truth because the truth-seeking soul has died in them.

Unfortunately, all of the Divine prophets were faced with such persons who were either of the rich puissant ones, or of the deluded and mammonish scholars, or of the ignorant zealous laymen.

Then, it adds:

"...nor would you be a follower of their Qiblah,..."

That is, if they think that, with their sayings and uproars, the Muslims' Qiblah may change again, they are mistaken. This Qiblah is permanent and it is the final everlasting Qiblah for all Muslims.

This kind of speaking is, in fact, one of the ways of concluding the reproaches of opponents by standing firm and proving that those futile uproars will not change anything.

Then it adds that they are so fanatic in their creed that:

"...neither are they the followers of each other's Qiblah..."

Neither would the Jews follow the Christian's Qiblah nor would the Christians follow the Jews' Qiblah.

Then, again for more emphasis, it warns the Prophet (S):

"...And if you follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, then you will surely be of the Unjust."

Such warnings which are stated in the form of conditional sentences, addressing the Prophet (S) are frequently seen in the Qur'an, the purpose of which is threefold:

The first is that all know that, regarding the law of *Allah*, there is no difference between the servants of *Allah* and even the Divine prophets are included under those laws, therefore, if, for the sake of argument, the holy Prophet (S), too, were to delude from the Truth, he would also be involved with the Lord's punishment, though such a supposition is impossible concerning the prophets (as) with their Faith and immense knowledge and whose ranks of virtue are known. (And, as it was stated before, a conditional proposition does not necessarily verify the existence of a protasis.)

The second thing is that, taking into consideration the above circumstance, other people would think about their own situations and know that when the Prophet (S) is being warned, then how much more they should be careful about their responsibilities and duties. They must never follow their enemies' perverted desires or give attention to their uproars.

The third aim is to make it clear that the holy Prophet (S), too, has no right on his own to change anything in *Allah's* ordinances. It is not so that anyone can collide or come to terms with him, since he is a servant, too, and obedient to His Command.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verses 146-147

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقًا مِّنْهُمْ لَيَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

146. "Those to whom We have given the (earlier) Book, recognize him (the Prophet) as they recognize their sons, but a group of them most surely conceal the truth while they know (it)."

147. "The Truth is from your Lord, therefore be not one of the doubters."

Following the former discussions about the obstinacy and bigotry of a party of the People of the Book, the first verse of the above says:

"Those to whom We have given the (earlier) Book, recognize him (the Prophet) as they recognize their sons..."

They have learnt about his name and his specific characteristics in their religious books.

"...but a group of them most surely conceal the truth while they know (it)."

Some of them, of course, having seen those clear signs of the promised Prophet (S) embraced Islam. It is quoted from, Abdillah-ibn-Salam, who previously had been one of the Jewish scholars and then accepted Islam, that he said that from before, he knew the Prophet of Islam (S) better than he knew his son, [2](#) and the other scholars knew the Prophet of Islam well, too.

This verse uncovers an important fact. It denotes that the earlier Divine Books had contained a very vivid and distinct illustration of the physical and spiritual characteristics of the Prophet of Islam (S). It had been so clear that those who were acquainted with those Books could draw a clear image of him in their minds.

Can anybody imagine that any name or description about the Prophet of Islam's (S) characteristics could not be found mentioned in the Turah and the Evangel?

Certainly not, because, as the above verse indicates, the Prophet of Islam (S) was announced openly and very clearly before their eyes by his epithets that were cited in the books of the 'People of the Book'. If this statement were not true, might the scholars of the 'People of the Book' not rise against it?

Would they not present their books to him and insist that he should prove his claim thereby according to their Books? Was it possible that even one of their learned men would surrender to the invitation of the Prophet of Islam (S) without sufficient cause?

Thus, such verses in the Holy Qur'an are, themselves, clear evidence for them to the rightfulness of the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam (S).

Then, to emphasize upon the former statements about the change of the Qiblah or the ordinances of Islam in general, it says:

"The Truth is from your Lord, therefore be not one of the doubters."

The announcement to the holy Prophet (S) that he, in fact, is the Apostle from *Allah* sounds to some as a consolation to the holy Prophet himself (S) so that he would never doubt when the enemies sneered or scorned upon either the change of the Qiblah or about other problems, even if all of them allied with each other against him.

As it was mentioned before, any warning or threat addressed to the holy Prophet (S) is always and invariably meant, not for the holy Prophet (S), but for his followers. He never doubted in the Divine revelation because the revelation was, for him, on the level of 'certainty of sight'.

1. The of the First Part of the Holy Qur'an ended on the previous page, but verses about the theme of Qiblah in the Qur'an is still continued. Hence, to complete the idea, we had to add some verses of Part 2, here, at the end of this volume.

2. AL-Manar, vol. 2 & AL-Tafsir-ul-Kabir, Fakhr-i-Razi: vol. 4, p. 128

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