

The Qiblah

The schools concur that the Ka'bah is the *qiblah* of the one who is near it and is able to see it. They differ regarding the *qiblah* of one who is away from the Ka'bah and unable to see it.

The Hanafis, Malikis, Hanbalis and a group of Imami legists observe: The *qiblah* of one at a distance is the direction of the Ka'bah and not the Ka'bah itself.

The Shafi'is and most Imamis state: It is *wajib* for one who is near the Ka'bah as well for one at a distance, to face the Ka'bah itself. Thus, if it is possible to ascertain that one is facing the Ka'bah itself, one must do so; otherwise the probability (*zann*) that one may be facing it, is sufficient. It is obvious that one who is far away from the Ka'bah is in no way capable of ascertaining that he is facing the Ka'bah, considering that the earth is spherical. Consequently, the *qiblah* of one away from the Ka'bah will be the direction of the Ka'bah and not the Ka'bah itself.

Ignorance of the Qiblah (Direction)

It is *wajib* for a person ignorant of the *qiblah* to inquire and strive to determine its exact or approximate direction¹, and in case neither of the two is possible, the four Sunni schools and a group from among the Imamis say: He may perform *salat* in any direction; his *salat* will be valid and it will not be *wajib* for him to repeat it except in the opinion of the Shafi'is.

Most Imamis observe: He will perform *Salat* in four directions to comply with the command for *salat* and to ascertain its proper performance. But if there isn't sufficient time for performing *salat* four times or if one is incapable of performing it in four directions, he may perform *salat* in the directions that he can.

A Subsidiary Issue

If a person prays not facing the *qiblah* and comes to know about his mistake, the Imamis state: If the error is known during the *salat* and the correct *qiblah* lies between his two hands, the part of the *salat* already performed will be valid and he will have to correct his direction for the remaining part of the *salat*.

But if it is known that he has been praying facing the east, or the west, or the north with his back towards the *qiblah* (this is with reference to Lebanon where the *qiblah* lies to the south), the *salat* will be invalid and he will perform it anew.

If the error is known after performing the *salat*, it should be performed again if its time is still there, not otherwise. Some Imamis say: The *salat* will not be repeated if there is only a little deviation from the *qiblah*, irrespective of whether its time is still there or not.

But if it has been performed facing east or west [the right or the left (90 degrees off)], it should be repeated if its time is there, not otherwise. If the *salat* is performed with one's back to the *qiblah* (180 degrees off), it should be repeated regardless of whether its time is still there or has passed.

The Hanafis and the Hanbalis observe: If after inquiring and striving to find the *qiblah* one is unable to ascertain its approximate direction and performs *salat* in a direction which turns out to be wrong, he must change his direction accordingly if the mistake is known during the *salat*, and if it is known afterwards his *salat* is valid and he has no further obligation.

The Shafi'i's say: If it becomes certain that there has been a mistake in determining the *qiblah*, it is *wajib* to repeat the *salat*, but if there is only a likelihood of mistake, the *salat* is valid irrespective of whether the probability arises during the *salat* or after it.

As to one who neither makes an inquiry nor an effort to determine the *qiblah*, but by chance performs the *salat* in the right direction, the Malikis and Hanbalis consider his *salat* to be invalid (*batil*).

The opinion of the Imamis and the Hanafis is that his *salat* is valid provided he has no doubts while praying and was sure about the direction of the *qiblah* at the time of starting the *salat*, because, as pointed out by the Imamis, in such a situation it is correct for him to make the *niyyah* of acquiring nearness (*qurbah*) to God.

¹. The command to face Masjid al-Haram has come in verse 144 of Surat al-Baqarah (...So turn your face towards Masjid al-Haram), and the leave to turn in any direction in verse 115: (To God belong the East and the West; where ever you turn there is the Face of God). Some scholars have held that the former verse abrogates the latter.

Others disagree and point out that there is no abrogation involved here, nor is it a case of one being particular and the other general. The way to reconcile the two verses, they point out, is that the former verse applies to those who know the direction of the *qiblah* and commands them to turn towards it. The latter verse specifically applies to one who is at a loss regarding its direction and orders him to perform *salat* in any direction he wants. This opinion seems to be more credible.

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