

Khutba

25.02.11

English

The Outer and Inner Qiblah

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Islám,

Every time we prepare for Saláh, the first thing we do after we've taken wudhú is to face the Qiblah. Occasionally, we find ourselves in an unfamiliar place, then we have to calculate the direction of Qiblah. It may need a compass and a map, to ensure that we face Qiblah in our prayers. This routine has become such a habit, that we don't even think about it. We take it for granted. We simply can't imagine doing our prayers, without facing Qibla. But why is this so important? What is the significance of Qiblah? Why can't we just face any direction that's convenient?

Qiblah is important because it gives us a sense of unity, uniformity and discipline. If there were no Qibla, we would pray as isolated groups with no connection to one another. Qiblah gives us a focus, a common sense of purpose, a direction.

In Súra Al-Baqara v.143, we read:

“The fools among the people will say: “What has turned them from the Qiblah to which they were used?” Say: To Alláh belong both East and West; He guides whom He pleases to a Way that is straight. “

This verse refers to that historic event, when just over 16 months after Hijra, a revelation came, changing the Qibla from Masjid Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem to the Bait-Alláh, the House of Alláh in Makka,. The change of Qiblah was a very significant move. Jerusalem, as we all know, is a city of great importance to Muslims, Jews and Christians. By facing Jerusalem as the first Qiblah, the young Muslim Ummah linked itself with the long series of prophets that included Nabí Ibrahim and Nabí 'Isá.

By turning towards Makka as the new Qiblah, the Muslims could assert themselves as a new nation with its own distinct centre, and still be linked to the most ancient prophetic traditions. It was of course, in Makka that the first House of Worship was built by Nabí Ibrahim. Makka was also the city which from which many were exiled because of their faith. If we look at Makka on the map of the world, we will see that it is situated in a central position, on the Arabian Peninsula, which itself lies midway between Africa, Asia and Europe. It is at the crossroads of major continents, and also of great civilisations. The next verse goes on to say,

“Thus have We made of you an Ummah, justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations and the Messenger a witness over yourselves. And We appointed the Qiblah to which you were used only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (from the faith). Indeed it was (a momentous change) except to those guided by Alláh. And never would Alláh make your faith of no effect. For Alláh is, to all people, most surely, full of kindness, Most Merciful.”

Another important result of this change of Qiblah from Jerusalem to Makka, was that it became a great test of faith, to separate the true believers from those whose loyalties were really outside the Muslim community. A clear distinction had to be drawn between the goals and ambitions of Islam and that of other faiths, particularly of the Jews and Christians. On this matter the Qur'án is quite emphatic.

“We see the turning of your face (for guidance) to the heavens; now shall We turn you to a Qiblah that will please you. Turn then your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque; wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction. The people of the book know well that that is the truth from their Lord. Nor is Alláh unmindful of what they do.”

“Even if you were to bring to the people of the Book all the signs (together) they would not follow your Qiblah; nor are you going to follow their Qiblah; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qiblah. If, after the knowledge has reached you, you were to follow their (vain) desires then, indeed, you would be (clearly) in the wrong.”

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Islam, our Qibla is a very important part of our lives. Every Muslim knows that without the Qibla, none of our daily prayers, salát, can be done correctly. Even before we start, we need to know the direction of Makka. Qibla is about orientation, about our sense of direction.

But, apart from the precise physical direction we must face, what really is the purpose of facing towards Makka and aligning ourselves with the Qiblah?

Whenever we begin our salaát, we not only face the House of Alláh in Makka, but we also connect ourselves, along an invisible line, an axis that proceeds from every point on earth, to the Spiritual Centre of Islam. Whether we pray alone, or as recommended, we pray in a group, we do so as a part of the great Ummah or Community of Islam. Standing and facing Qiblah in our prayers, connects us along an invisible line, to every other Muslim on the planet. We become an important link in the huge chain of worshippers who face Makka at least 5 times each day. If we could go up into space and look down on the earth and see all the Muslims at prayer, we would see a huge flower the size of the earth, opening and closing its millions of petals. Each of those petals represents a Muslim at prayer. And those of us who have been blessed with the invitation from Alláh to perform Hajj or 'Umráh, will remember that remarkable sight inside Al-Harrám al-Shareef. There, at prayer times, it is as if a giant flower opens and closes its petals, as Muslims prostrate as one body, in neat and orderly rows, around the Kaaba.

So, Qibla is not only about degrees latitude or longitude on the compass. It's about bringing together every nation, language, race and tribe on this planet, in regular acts of worship linked to a common centre. Qibla lies at the very heart of the great Ummah of Islam. Qibla is the navigational axis that connects every Muslim through the Holy Kaaba in Makka, to every other Muslim. This is the physical expression of Tauhíd, the belief in Alláh's oneness, Alláh's Unity. Because Alláh is One, therefore His Ummah is one, and our Qiblah, our direction for worship, is one.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Islam,

We Muslims have one Qibla that points us to The House of Alláh, in Makka. This Qibla keeps us united, disciplined, and focussed, like the beautifully ordered rows of petals on a flower. But in a sense, this is the outer Qiblah, the Qiblah of geography, navigation, and points of the compass. In a sense, there is also, another Qiblah, equally important. This other Qiblah is internal, invisible, psychological, spiritual. This is the Qiblah of the Heart.

Sadly, many Muslims focus exclusively on the first kind of Qibla. They are meticulous about the

precise compass readings to ensure that they are facing exactly the right way for Salaat. However, they neglect the Qibla of the heart. While their prayers are physically and outwardly correct, their hearts, their emotions and ambitions and desires are pointing in a hundred different directions. To these Muslims, Prayer has become merely a good habit, but their main concerns in life are focussed on their jobs, their families, their material possessions and worldly pleasures. While the outer appearance is all correct and proper, the inner personality is fragmented and in crisis. Worst of all, so many Muslims are quite content to live this way, and die this way. But this is not an acceptable way of life for a Muslim. The aim of a true believer should be, to bring together these 2 levels of existence, the outer Qibla and inner Qibla, the outer and inner personality, so that they are both focussed as one.

Let us pray to Alláh, subhanAlláhu ta'ala, to help bring together our outer personality as well as our innermost desires and ambitions. O Alláh, help us, to refocus ourselves, and to bring a convergence of the outer Qibla we face in every salaah, and the inner Qibla, of our hearts. O Alláh, help us in this lifelong battle against the temptations of Shaytán. O Alláh! Help us to filter out those distractions and vanities that obscure our vision of Your Sirát Al-Mustaqeem, Your Straight Path. O Alláh, guide us all to what pleases you, and leads us to Your Grace and your Mercy.

Ameen.