

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

THE QIBLA CHANGE

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The Arabic word 'Qibla' is formed from its root word 'QAF-BA-LAM' and means to face or front something, to advance, to encounter or to confront face to face. It forms words such as 'istaqbalahu' which means that he faced him or it, that he turned his face towards him or it or indeed met him.

10. اسْتَقْبَلَهُ : see اسْتَدْبَرَهُ . *He faced him, or it. (TA) He turned his face towards him, or it. — He came before his face. — He went to meet him; he met him, or encountered him. He saw it before him: he looked forward to it: he saw it, or knew it, beforehand.*

[Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon](#) [1]

Other word derivatives are also formed such as 'qubalatahu' which means opposite to, in a position so as to face him or it. Other words are also formed which imply a direction, point, place or something which is in front of another thing.

قِبَالَتُهُ *Opposite to, in a position so as to face, him or it. (K, &c.) See حِيَالٌ in art. حول. — قِبَالَةٌ The direction, point, place, or tract, in front of a thing; the opposite direction &c.*

[Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon](#) [2]

The Quran consistently uses the word 'Qibla' in the context of a direction of devotion or prayer (2:142, 2:143, 2:144, 2:145, 2:145, 10:87)

010:087

"And We inspired Moses and his brother with this Message: "Provide houses for your people in Egypt, make your houses into places of worship / direction of prayer (**Arabic: Qiblata**n) and establish prayers: and give glad tidings to those who believe!"

THE QIBLA CHANGE

In the main, four verses of the Quran (2:142-2:145) deal with the incident in question. Through an analysis of these verses God willing, an attempt will be made to ascertain how much information one can extract and infer with regards the event in question.

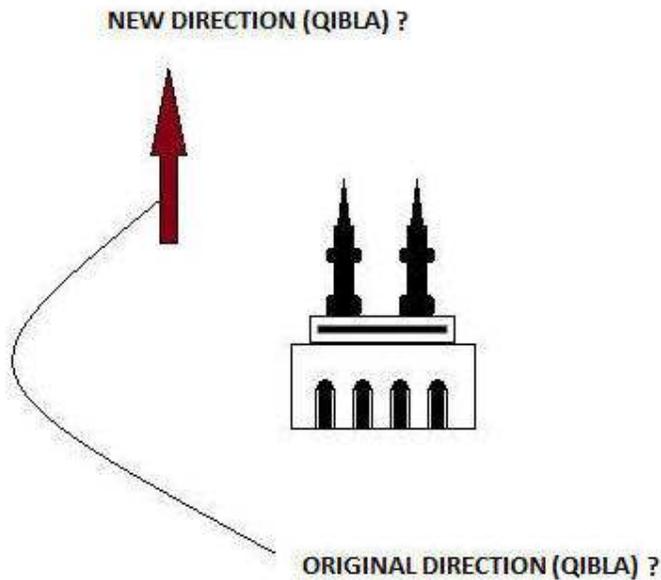
THE FIRST CHANGE

002:142

"The fools among the people will say: "**What has turned them from the Qibla to which they were used to?**" Say: To God belong both the east and West: He guides whom He will to a Way that is straight"

It is clear from the above verse that a change **has already been made**. It is also clear that some assertions had been made by a section of the community who clearly questioned the Qibla change. Therefore from the first verse, we note that **ONE** Qibla change had occurred and therefore **TWO** separate directions are involved. **One** direction from which the change occurred and a **second** direction to which the change was made.

What is not immediately obvious from the verse at this stage is **(a) What the original direction was and (b) the location of the new direction.**



[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

INFERENCES:

The audience are clearly a section of the community described as 'foolish' (sufahau minal-nasi) and a very telling statement is captured which gives one a strong indication of the identity of the original 'Qibla'. "**What has turned them from the Qibla which they were used to (allati kanu ayaha)?**". The centre of devotion of the Prophet's community had always clearly been the Ka'ba which was also the Pagan sanctuary and a place of worship since the time of 'Jahliyya' (ignorance). Therefore, from the verse it is likely that a change had been made **from** the original sanctuary (the Ka'ba) which prompted the question from a section of the community.

This change must have indeed been momentous. A place of worship that had been utilised by generations as a centre of Pagan worship had now become challenged by a monotheistic preacher and his followers. The reason for the change is noted in the very next verse. This was to reveal those who were sincerely prepared to follow the teachings of the Prophet and to expose those that may not have truly believed or followed his message with sincerity. These individuals were possibly from those who were prepared for partial compromises such as retaining certain rituals and those beliefs that did not necessarily compromise their existing beliefs such as their particular direction of devotion and rejecting others.

002:143

"And thus We have made you a middle nation (of the middle way / balanced community) that you may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you. **And We appointed the Qibla which you formerly observed only that We might know him who follows the messenger, from him who turns on his heels. And indeed, this was a great (test) except for those whom God has guided aright. And it was not God's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for God is Full of Pity, Merciful toward mankind**"

Albeit the location of the new direction is unclear from the verses, there are further inferences that can be drawn. Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) at this stage was clearly associating himself with Prophet

Abraham^(pbuh) in faith. The message that had now been revealed to him in Arabic speech was a confirmation and continuation of the guidance from the previous scriptures and united him in faith with those to whom the previous scriptures had been revealed (Jews and Christians). There is also some affiliation noted with the Holy Lands in verse 17:1 where a journey was made to the Holy Lands, an area which had clearly been blessed. It is very likely therefore, that the new 'Qibla' was consistent with those of the previous scriptures and pointed towards the Holy Lands given that the revelation united him in faith with the followers of those Prophets to whom inspiration had also been sent.

004.163 -64

"Indeed, We have sent you inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Prophets after him we sent inspiration to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms. And messengers We have already mentioned to you and of others We have not and to Moses God spoke direct (speaking with him / (in) a conversation) **(Arabic: takliman)"**

This view is further supported by the statement made by the section of the community that questioned this change (2:142). God responded by informing them that all directions belonged to Him and that in effect, He was Omnipresent and God of them all.

002:142 (Part)

"...Say: To God belong both the east and West: He guides whom He will to a Way that is straight"

THE SECOND CHANGE

002.144 -45

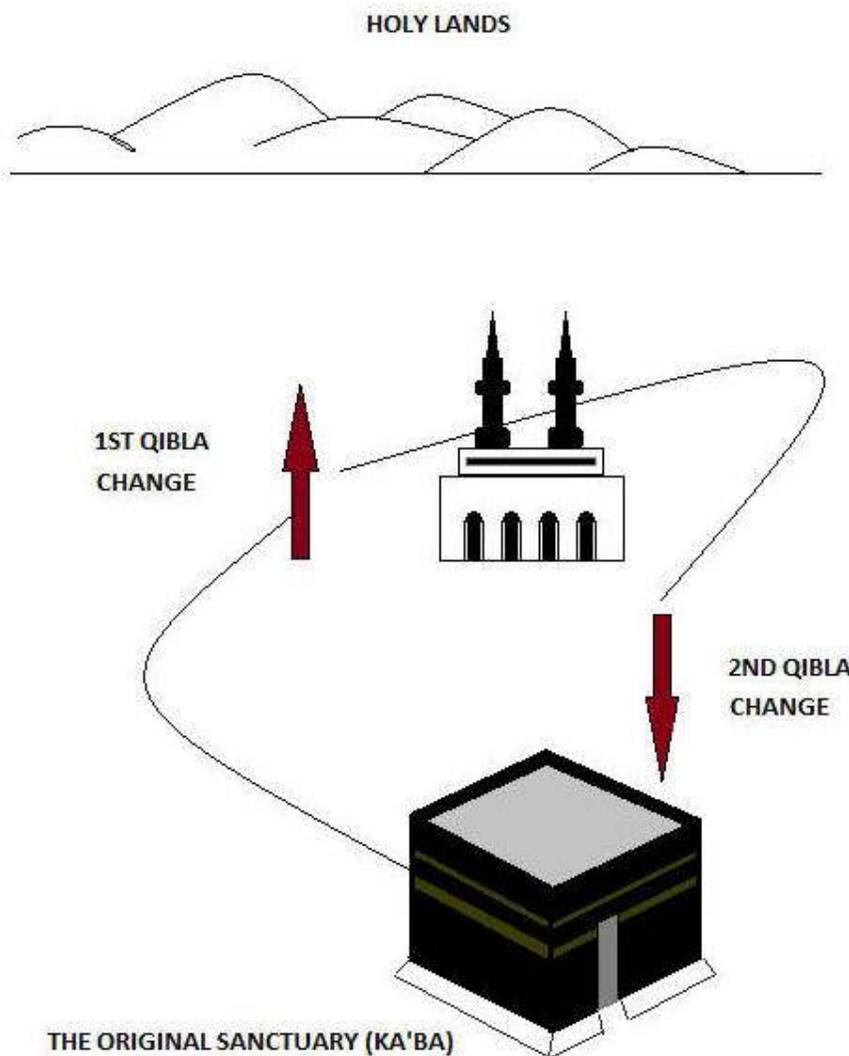
"Indeed, We see the turning of your face (for guidance) to the heavens. So We shall surely turn you to a direction of devotion / prayer **(Arabic: Qiblatan)** that you will be pleased with. **So turn your face in the direction of the sacred Mosque and wherever ye are, turn your faces in that direction.** And indeed, the people of the Book know well that it is the truth from their Lord and God is not 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 direction of devotion / prayer **(Arabic: Qibla); nor are you going to follow their Qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qibla. If you after the knowledge has reached you, were you to follow their (vain) desires, indeed, you (would) then (be) surely among the wrongdoers"**

A second change is noted in the above verse and confirmed as one towards the Sacred Mosque (the Ka'ba). It is also clear that this location was a separate Qibla from the followers of the previous scriptures. The separation of the two Qibla's is now clearly emphasised. It's emphatic tone supports the earlier suggestion that the first Qibla change was indeed made towards a direction of the Holy Lands and this second change amounted to a change from the Holy Lands back to the original sanctuary at Makkah (i.e. the Ka'ba). It is also quite significant to note the expression "**nor are you going to follow their Qibla (wama anta bitabi'in qiblatahum)"** which also supports the suggestion that the Prophet had indeed once followed their Qibla.

From the verse it is also noted that the Prophet was clearly subject to some anguish. The exact **reason** for the anguish is not elaborated but this could be a part of his personal struggle, one resulting from the pressures of his community or a mixture of both. However the **nature** of the anguish seems to be associated with the direction of prayer that was being currently followed. God's

response came to alleviate this distress '...So We shall surely turn you to a direction of devotion / prayer (Arabic: Qiblatan) that you will be pleased with'.

Given the Prophet's background and his association with the Ka'aba, it is not surprising to note that the direction was reinstated back to the Sacred Mosque (Masjid Al-Haram) which throughout the Quran is only a reference to the Makkan sanctuary. The People of the Book clearly would not have followed this Qibla and the status quo now constituted of two different directions of prayer. There would have remained one direction for the followers of the previous scriptures and a second for the followers of the final message (i.e. The Quran). God could never be restricted to any one direction (all directions / everything belonging to him) therefore the linkage was now to remain by virtue of faith as opposed to direction.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Two Qibla changes are noted from the Quranic verses. It has been suggested in the above article that the original Qibla was indeed the Makkan sanctuary (the Ka'ba). This was later changed for the reasons cited by verse 2:143 to possibly a location in the Holy Lands such as Jerusalem which was the centre of devotion for the people of the previous scriptures. The second Qibla change was a reversion back to the Ka'ba from the Holy Lands.

REFERENCES

- [1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 8, Supplement, Page 2983
[2] Ibid., Page 2984

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