

# Jurisprudence of Qibla

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## Abstract:

In this study, we examine the Fiqhi aspect of finding the Qibla, and then we find the corresponding geometrical requirements. We explore what the word “شطر: Shatr” means and how it affects finding the Qibla.

## Introduction:

Finding the Qibla is to turn the face towards the Kabaa. It is important in two ways:

- 1- It is a condition for performing the Salat, and since the Salat is obligatory, then, it is obligatory to find the right direction.
- 2- Muslims have been ordered specifically to turn towards the Sacred Mosque.

و من حيث خرجت فول وجهك شطر المسجد الحرام و حيثما كنتم فولوا وجوهكم شطره

*“And turn your face towards the direction of the sacred Masjid, and wherever you were turn your faces in that direction” (2,150)*

Therefore, scholars have agreed that it is a must “obligatory “ to turn towards the Sacred Masjid when performing prayer.

## The Process of Finding the Qibla (Due Diligence): التحري

It is important to perform the due diligence to find the Qibla because it is answering Allah’s order to turn towards the direction of Sacred Masjid. So, Muslims have to do the best to respond to the order: فاتقوا الله ما استطعتم

**Definition:** Mihrab: (المحراب) The direction of the Masjid.

Scholars have defined due diligence in terms of stages as follows:

**Hanafi:** The first thing is to find old Mihrab that was adopted by Sahabi (companion) or the Tabii (the generation afterwards). If not available, then asking people who know about the Qibla, then, if none was available, then try to find it on your own.

**Maliki:** They decided reference Mihrabs (Masjid of Prophet, Amwi, Amro bin Ass, and Kirawan) that should be followed. For non reference Mihrab, an expert can do his own determination. The next level is to ask the knowledgeable, next do the best you can.

**Shafii:** The first thing is to find for yourself. If not able, then ask knowledgeable, or follow Mihrab, or use available tools. The next level is to do what you can, and the last level is to follow someone who tried to find the Qibla.

**Hanbali:** Use Mihrabs, then ask knowledgeable, then try your best.

In summary, it is incumbent on the Muslim to find the Qibla in the most reliable way, and to help people in that they listed stages or levels of finding the Qibla from the best to the less reliable, whether it is following Mihrabs that are known to be correct, to asking knowledgeable people who are experts on the subject, and when nothing of that is available, to do what you can with what you have.

### **Errors Handling:**

#### **Didn't do due diligence to search for the correct direction:**

Salat is null and had to repeat according to (**Shafii, Hanbali, and Maliki**). For **Hanafi**, it is also null unless he found out that he indeed was in the right direction, then no need to repeat.

#### **Found after Salat that the direction was wrong (after due diligence):**

Salat is fine and no need to repeat ( **Hanafi, Hanbali**) For **Maliki** Salat is acceptable, but it is better to repeat it within its time. For **Shafii**, the Salat had to be repeated.

#### **Found that he is in the wrong direction during Salat:**

He turns to the right direction and continues the rest of his prayer (**Hanafi, Hanbali**), and similarly for **Maliki** unless the error was excessive, then he had to abort and repeat. For **Shafii**, he had to abort and repeat.

#### **Historical case:**

In 2010 Muslims in Indonesia have discovered that their Qibla was towards Kenya and not Mecca. As a result, a debate between scholars ensued whether people should repeat their prayers or not.

### **Fiqh Schools Opinions in the Turning to the Direction of Qibla:**

For **Maliki**, the Kabaa is the cubic structure itself, while the **Rest** agree that the Kabaa extends up to the heavens, and down through earth.

For people who see the Kabaa, they should face it, and that is agreed upon by all the scholars, however, for people who are far and can't see it, then there are some differences in opinions:

#### **Shafii:**

The correct direction is the direction of the Kabaa itself because the Quran specifically stated “*And wherever you were turn your faces towards it*” وحيثما كنتم فولوا وجوهكم شطره

#### **The Rest:**

Their criteria is relaxed and somewhat confusing, it says that to be in the right direction, at least part of the face should be facing the Kabaa.

## **Instances When the Requirement For Turning Towards the Qibla is Dropped:**

- 1- Nafl (optional) prayer while riding. (2,115) فأينما تولوا فثم وجه الله
- 2- Unusual circumstances where it is not possible to turn towards the Qibla like sickness, fear, etc...(2, 239) فإن خفتم فرجالاً أو ركبناً

### **Our Position:**

For the process of finding the Qibla we follow the Hanafi opinion: You do the due diligence for finding the Qibla. If you discover the error during the prayer, just turn to the right direction and continue. If you discover the error after finishing, no need to repeat. و ما كان الله ليضيع إيمانكم إن الله بالناس لرؤوف رحيم

For the definition of the Qibla we follow the Maliki in determining that the Kabba (the cubic structure) is the Qibla that we should turn to.

Our position similar to Shafii opinion that we should turn towards the direction of the Kabba.

However, the Shafii aims for the Kabba which extends upwards and downwards.

### **Finding the Right Direction:** (2, 144) فلنولينك قبلة ترضاها

The above fine distinction between our approach for turning to Kabba and Shafii is necessary because of the following:

Let's take the direction in North America as an example. If the Kabaa extends all the way up to heavens, and down through earth, then, to turn in its direction, the antipodal point would be the part that is closest to North America, and the direction of Qibla would be South-West. Such consideration would create more than one focal point on earth for Qibla.

To avoid such a situation, we follow the Maliki's opinion that the Kabaa is the structure itself without extension, therefore, the Qibla direction in North America is North-East. The decisive factor here is the word "direction شطر" which made all the difference in our view. To explain how this works, we need some background.

### **Geometrical Meaning of Facing the Kabaa:**

The order in the verse of facing the direction of the Sacred Masjid can be translated into geometrical requirements as follows:

When an observer faces a monument (target) he forms a plane with the target, and the line of sight from the eye of observer to any point on the target falls within this plane. We call this plane the observation plane and it is shown in figure 1.

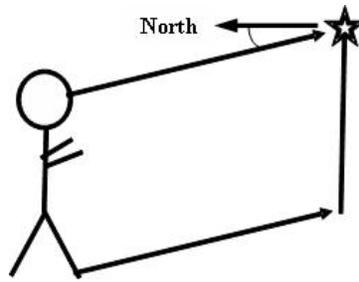


Figure 1. An Observer Facing a Target Forms the Observation Plane

The observation plane makes an angle with the direction of north, giving us the direction of the target. The Qibla direction is the direction of the observation plane, therefore, we need to be in the observation plane to meet the verse requirement, and that has huge implication that we will see in the next sections. A direct result of being in the observation plane is that the direction of the Qibla on the surface of the earth follows the great circle path (assuming that the earth is a perfect sphere).

Some have suggested an alternative method for finding the Qibla direction by drawing a line on the map (Mercator projection) to Mecca. However this method doesn't meet the condition in the verse (facing the Kabba), and therefore, such approach is unacceptable for Qibla determination. (This method is called Rhumb line approach and is useful for navigation).

An example of the difference between the two methods is given in figure 2.



Figure 2. Great Circle line (blue: N-E direction) v.s. Rhumb line (red: S-E direction)

**The World is Not Flat:**

This is something unexpected that we found, and it constitutes an indirect proof that the Earth is not flat, and that is achieved using simple language that hides very sophisticated geometrical and technical information.

How is that done ?

The answer is in the verse:

و من حيث خرجت فول وجهك شطر المسجد الحرام و حيثما كنتم فولوا وجوهكم شطره

“And turn your face towards the direction of the sacred Masjid, and wherever you were turn your faces in that direction”(2,150)

If the world was flat, then the verse should read: turn towards Kabaa (عين الكعبة) and it will look like what we see in figure 3.

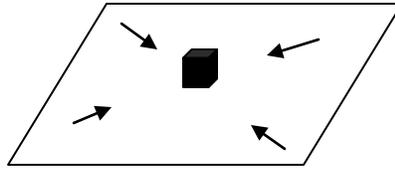


Figure 3. Turning to the Kabaa on a Flat Earth

However, since the world is not flat, it wouldn't be practical to turn towards the Kabaa. For example, suppose that the person is in a basement, then he has to use an inclined plane so he can face the Kabaa as can be seen in figure 4.

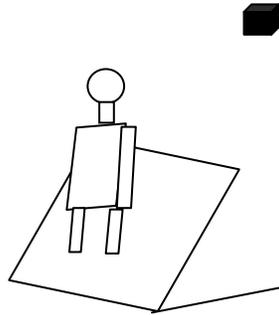


Figure 4. A Person in a Basement Has to Use Inclined Plane to Face the Kabaa

The same problem would face a person who is far away on the spherical earth, as we can see in figure 5. In this case, a person standing normally on earth would not be able to face the Kabaa itself because he might be at different level. His line of sight (the dashed line) would not be able to hit the Kabaa unless he comes up with a suitable inclined plane.

While finding the inclination of the plane is difficult, it is virtually impossible to construct one every time you want to do a prayer. However, it would be very easy to turn in the direction of the Kabaa: The key word here is the word “ شطر ” or direction جهة الكعبة, in this case, there is no need to have an incline to face the Kabaa (عين الكعبة), you only need to face the direction of the Kabaa, and that can be easily accomplished. In that sense, the Quran with this word confirms that the earth is not flat !

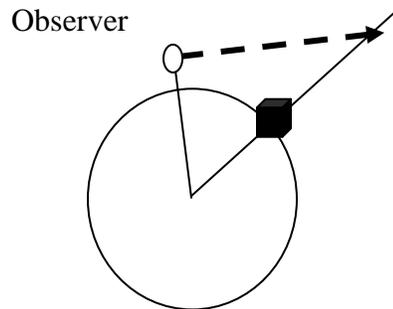


Figure 5. A Person Standing on Earth Would Not Normally Face the Kabaa

The picture can be explained further with figure 6. In that case, a person standing normally on the surface of the earth (upright or aligned with the Z direction) would see the horizontal plane (white plane). The directions in this plane are N or E (in green). To turn towards the direction of Mecca the person would need to turn in the direction of the red line, and that can be easily found by compass or some other means, and there is no need to adjust up or down because he is not following the red line, but is following the direction of the red line in his plane: the local horizontal plane.

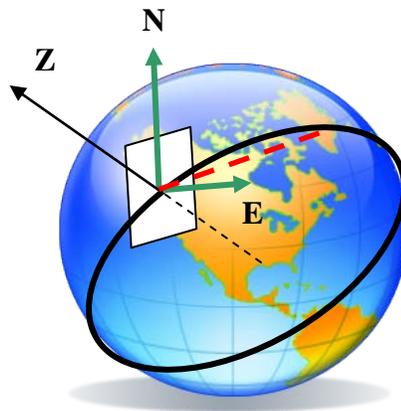


Figure 6. The Geometry of Direction on the Surface of Earth

**Requirements For Individuals v.s. Mosques:**

If we follow the rule that we should do our best in obeying the orders of God, then, for a Masjid, which is a symbol for the Muslims, and affects the prayers of many, many people, it is worth it to conduct a study and to achieve accuracy for orienting the Masjid. These days, it is possible to achieve an error of  $\pm 0.5^\circ$  easily. In fact, the prophet (P) when he sent his companion (Weber Ben Yahnus) to Yemen and told him to build a Masjid, he gave him specific instructions as to how to orient it. The Masjid (Great Sanaa Masjid) is still there to this date, and its Qibla is so accurate any one can witness for himself the miracle.

Of course, for an individual, it doesn't make sense to do a study to get high accuracy every time you want to pray.

We should keep in mind the distinction between the requirements and our ability to attain them. Our direction ideally is the Kabba, and we try our best to attain that.

لا يكلف الله نفساً إلا وسعها

The perception of people of the error in orientation differs greatly from person to person, however, we found from an experiment we conducted that most people (more than 75%) noticed the deviation from the correct direction when the deviation exceeded seven degrees (see the study).

The Hadith (ما بين المشرق والمغرب قبلة) *Between the east and west is Qibla* gives a great allowance for people who don't have the ability to find the Qibla accurately.

Magnetic compass is practical device that we can use these days for finding the Qibla for individuals, but it is not suitable for Masjid Qibla determination.

In summary, since the circumstances in the case of Masjid are different from that of an individual, the requirements are different in each case.

### **Conclusion:**

We have examined the Fiqhi aspect of finding the Qibla, and we determined the geometrical meaning of turning towards the direction of the Qibla. We saw that the Quran asks us to turn towards the direction of the Kabaa and not towards the Kabaa itself and that made it practical. Otherwise, it would have been virtually impossible to do the proper prayer five times a day anywhere.

It is amazing that every word in the Quran has been put very carefully to delivery very precise meaning

أفلا يتدبرون القرآن ولو كان من عند غير الله لوجدوا فيه اختلافاً كثيراً

*“Why Don't they study the Quran, Had it been from other than Allah they would have found in it a lot of discrepancies” (4,82)*

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