



REGARDING THE QIBLA AT MASJID VAUGHAN:

Question:

I am a regular at Masjid Vaughan. It is a beautiful mosque that was once a very old church built in the 1800s. The exact Qibla from True North at this location is 54.50441151562552 degrees East of North. However, the founders of the Mosque have established the Qibla at around 57 degrees East of North, as the building is situated in such a way that this slight divergence is architecturally more accommodating for larger congregations. Is my prayer valid if I pray with the congregation knowing that there is a slight divergence from the exact Qibla direction?

Answer:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise is due to God and blessings and peace be upon His Messenger, family and companions. Thank you for your inquiry.

It is not an obligation for someone who is distant from Mecca to face the exact direction (*'ayn*) of the *Ka'ba* for the prayer. The obligation is to face the general direction (*jiba*), as is indicated by God's words:

So turn your face towards its shatr. –Quran 2:144

'*Shatr*', according to many commentators of the Quran indicates the *Kaba*'s general direction as is clarified by the Hadith:

That which is between the east and west is the Qibla. –Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah

Furthermore, it is physically impossible for all people in a straight prayer row, which is longer than the width of the *Ka'ba*, to all face the exact direction of the *Ka'ba*, unless a selection of people at both ends of the row turn towards the Imam slightly (i.e. making a semi circle). Yet, no one from among the scholars require this for people praying far away from the sacred precinct. So how can it be an obligation to be exact in facing the *Ka'ba* from far distances?

In summary, a prayer that is performed facing the general direction of the *Ka'ba* is valid in the sacred law, even if one is aware that it is not exact, so as long as you have not turned your side or back to the *Ka'ba*. This is the position of the majority of scholars, namely, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Malik ibn Anas and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and their respective schools (may God have mercy on them all). It is also the position of Imam al-Shafi himself, while others of his school have differed with him.

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Corroborative Citations

Quran 2:144

We have seen thee turning thy face about in the heaven; now We will surely turn thee to a direction that shall satisfy thee. Turn thy face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you are, turn your faces towards its shatr.

قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ ط فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ
قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا ج فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ
وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ

Imam al-Quturbi (d. 1273/671H) in his famous exegesis *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* says:

The scholars have differed whether it is an obligation for one who is distant from the *Ka'ba* to face its exact direction (*'ayn*) or to face its general direction (*jiba*). Some hold this first position to which Ibn al-Arabi (Qadi Abu Bakr, d. 1149/543H) says: “it is weak because it demands a legal responsibility that cannot be fulfilled”. Others hold that facing the general direction (*jiba*) is the obligation, and this is the correct position for three reasons. First, it is consistent with what is physically possible in regards to one’s legal obligation. Second, this is what has been commanded in the Qur’an, God says: “*so turn your face towards the shatr of the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are..*” meaning, *wherever you are* on Earth – east or west – “*turn your faces towards its shatr*”. Third, the scholars cite evidence by way of hypothesizing a long prayer row that unquestionably extends many times the width of the House (*Ka'ba*).

وَأخْتَلَفُوا هَلْ فَرَضَ الْغَائِبُ اسْتِقْبَالَ الْعَيْنِ أَوْ
الْجِهَةِ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ قَالَ بِالْأَوَّلِ. قَالَ أَبُو
الْعَرَبِيِّ: وَهُوَ ضَعِيفٌ لِأَنَّهُ تَكْلِيفٌ لِمَا لَا
يَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ. وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ قَالَ بِالْجِهَةِ وَهُوَ
الصَّحِيحُ لِثَلَاثَةِ أَوْجُهٍ: الْأَوَّلُ: أَنَّهُ الْمُمْكِنُ
الَّذِي يَرْتَبِطُ بِهِ التَّكْلِيفُ. الثَّانِي: أَنَّهُ الْمَأْمُورُ
بِهِ فِي الْقُرْآنِ لِقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى: { فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ
شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ }
يَعْنِي مِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَرْقٍ أَوْ غَرْبٍ { فَوَلُّوا
وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ }. الثَّلَاثُ: أَنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ
أَحْتَجَّجُوا بِالصَّفِّ الطَّوِيلِ الَّذِي يُعْلَمُ قِطْعًا أَنَّهُ
أَضْعَافُ عَرْضِ الْبَيْتِ.

Imam Ibn Kathir (d. 1373/774H) in his exegesis *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* says:

One of the two positions of Imam al-Shafi, may God be pleased with him, is that the intent (of the command in the *ayah*) is finding the exact direction (*'ayn*) of the *Ka'ba*. His second position, with which the majority of scholars agree, is that the intent is facing the general direction (*jiba*).

وهو أحد قولي الشافعي رضي الله عنه إن
الغرض إصابة عين الكعبة، والقول الآخر، وعليه
الأكثر إن المراد المواجهة.



Al-Baydawī (d. 1286/685H) in his commentary says:

For one who is distant, it is sufficient to ascertain the general direction (*jiba*), as facing its exact direction (*'ayn*) is an undue hardship, except for one who is near.

والبعيد يكفيه مراعاة الجهة، فإن استقبال عينها
حرج عليه بخلاف القريب.

Zamakhshari (d. 1144/538H) in *Al-Kashaaf* says:

[...] meaning turn the face towards the Mosque, that is; its general direction (*jiba*), because facing the exact *Qibla* direction (*'ayn*) presents a great hardship to one who is distant. The mentioning of the *Sacred Mosque* (in the verse) without reference to the *Ka'ba* itself, is further evidence that the obligation is in respect to the general direction (*jiba*), not the exact direction (*'ayn*).

[...] أي اجعل تولية الوجه تلقاء المسجد أي
في جهته وسمته لأن استقبال عين القبلة فيه
حرج عظيم على البعيد. وذكر المسجد الحرام
دون الكعبة دليل في أن الواجب مراعاة الجهة
دون العين

Ibn al-Humam (d. 1457/861H) in *Fath al-Qadir 'ala al-Hidaya*, his commentary on Marghinani's well recognized work in the Hanafi School, says:

[...] So whoever is in Mecca, he is obliged to face its exact direction (*'ayn*) and whoever is distant, he is required to face the general direction (*jiba*), and this is the correct position, as the legal obligation is based on ability.

قَالَ (وَيَسْتَقْبِلُ الْقِبْلَةَ) لِقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى {فَوَلُّوا
وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ} ثُمَّ مَنْ كَانَ بِمَكَّةَ ففَرَضُهُ
إِصَابَةُ عَيْنِهَا ، وَمَنْ كَانَ غَائِبًا ففَرَضُهُ إِصَابَةُ
جِهَتِهَا هُوَ الصَّحِيحُ لِأَنَّ التَّكْلِيفَ بِحَسَبِ الْوُسْعِ

Imam al-Dasuqi (d. 1815/1230H) says in his commentary on Imam al-Dardir's *Sharh al-Kabir* of Khalil's *Mukhtasar* (the most authoritative legal manual in the Maliki School):

[...] In summary, regarding someone who is distant from Mecca, no one from among the scholars hold that God has made it an obligation for such a person to be exactly parallel with the *Ka'ba* itself. That is because it involves a legal responsibility that cannot be fulfilled. It would also entail the invalidity of a long prayer row, as the *Ka'ba* is only twenty-seven *dhira`* (13 metres) in height and twenty *dhira`* (11 metres) in width. Furthermore, there is scholarly consensus in opposition to this position.

وَحَاصِلُهُ أَنَّ مَنْ بَعْدَ عَنِ مَكَّةَ لَمْ يَقُلْ أَحَدٌ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ أَوْجَبَ عَلَيْهِ مُقَابَلَةَ الْكَعْبَةِ لِأَنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ
تَكْلِيفًا بِمَا لَا يُطَاقُ وَأَيْضًا يَلْزِمُ عَلَى ذَلِكَ عَدَمُ
صِحَّةِ صَلَاةِ الصَّفِّ الطَّوِيلِ فَإِنَّ الْكَعْبَةَ طُولُهَا مِنْ
الْأَرْضِ لِلسَّمَاءِ سَبْعَةٌ وَعِشْرُونَ ذِرَاعًا وَعَرْضُهَا
عِشْرُونَ ذِرَاعًا وَالْإِجْمَاعُ عَلَى خِلَافِهِ.