

Surah al-Baqarah (continued)

The second juzz starts with the mention of the changing of the Qiblah. In fact, the prophet continued facing towards Bayt-al-Maqdas in Jerusalem for 16 months after migrating to Madinah, however it was his heart felt desire that the Ka'bah should be the qibla for the Muslims, as this was a physical and ritual symbol of the nation of Ibraaheem. The Jews were at the forefront of putting forward many arguments against this, due to their hatred and stubbornness. They said: "what has made them change their qiblah?", to which Allah told the prophet to reply: "All the directions are for Allah". So, it is Allah who decides the direction; any direction in itself is neither more or less worthy of being the direction of prayer. In essence it is up to Allah and it is a test to see who really obeys Allah and his Messenger. These ayaat also highlight the burning desire, and the turning of the prophet's face towards the sky, in anticipation of the revelation for this matter, although he would not ask for it, in case it was not Allah's will.

The last point on the discussion of the changing of the Qiblah is that the real criterion for 'good' is not merely the direction in which you turn, but rather it is to have the correct belief, and do righteous deeds. All interactions and morality should be only directed towards seeking the pleasure of Allah, and it goes beyond simply turning ones face towards a particular direction, but rather, requires a whole shift of a person's attitude, aspirations and lifestyle to be directed towards Allah. The scholars have given a lot of importance to this Ayat (Ayat 177) and have extracted 17 principles from it. This ayat also shows that Islam is not a religion of mere rituals which are performed in places of worship alone, but in fact it permeates each aspect of life, it stays with one at all times, be it in the political, economic, or social sphere. It takes care of a Muslim in all places and so the Muslim is obliged to take every step in light of this deen.

This ayat has been given the name of Ayat ul Birr (righteousness) and the ahkaam (commandments) that follow it are known as the doors to Birr.

The following are the main points of the remaining sections of this juzz:

1. As there used to be 2 idols at Safa and Marwah during the time of jahiliyyah (pre Islamic ignorance), the companions used to refrain from doing tawaaf there, hence they are being told that there is nothing wrong with doing tawaf at the hills of Safa and Marwah. (Ayat 158).
2. The polytheists would make certain things haraam on themselves. Allah is telling them that it is not for you to make the things haraam or halaal, rather the things that are haraam are: "Dead meat, flowing blood, the flesh of swine, and every animal upon whom other than Allah's name is invoked". However, anyone who is in extreme need and has to eat such things to save his/her life, then there is no harm as long as it is not to enjoy it and the amount taken is not excessive to the need. (Ayat 173).
3. The Islamic shariah is based on justice, hence the law of qisaas (retribution) is commanded for the believers. The murderer can hence be murdered in retaliation of the murdered, regardless of the difference in their social, family, economic or physical status. "There is life in qisaas", for the killer and the killed; as when a potential murderer will think of committing murder, the punishment of retribution will deter him/her hence giving life to society and closing any doors to continuing inter tribal warfare. Islam has brought together mercy and justice in the punishment for murder; if the inheritors are given blood money as retribution then this is just, however if they choose to forgive the murderer, then this is indeed mercy. (Ayat 178 - 179).

4. A person should make a will, especially if death is imminent.
5. Fasting during Ramadan is an obligation on every sane, mature and able Muslim. Fasting, leads to taqwa, and also develops feelings of mutual care and concern between humans. This is the month in which the Quran was revealed and hence it has this elevated status. The sick or traveling person can make up any of the fasts they have missed at a later date. (Ayat 183 - 185).
6. It is allowed to have relations with ones spouse during the nights of Ramadan, however it is prohibited during the itikaaf period.
7. It is not allowed to gain any wealth through gambling, robbery, theft, bribery, or any other illegal forms of transactions. This has been mentioned as the desired affect and result of fasting, i.e. to abstain from acquiring such wealth.
8. The use of the lunar calendar is a fardh kifayah and also an Islamic sign/symbol, as many ibaadaath (acts of worship) are dependent upon this.
9. Jihad is an obligation on every Muslim, and its objective is to make the word of Allah supreme. As there is always a struggle between good and evil, Jihad is a constant phenomenon. The Muslims should be ever-prepared for this struggle and should not show any weakness in facing the enemy. (Ayat 190 - 195).
10. Hajj is an important pillar. It is the annual international congregation of Muslims, and a manifestation of equality and brotherhood, in which the rites and rituals as prescribed by Allah are followed. The ihraam for Hajj is specific to a few selected months, unlike the ihram for umrah which is all year round. It is permissible to buy and sell during Hajj. The mushrikeen had invented many things regarding Hajj e.g. Quraish would remain in Muzdalifah and would see it as an insult to go to Arafah. They are instructed to go to Arafah and not to try and distinguish themselves from the rest of the people. Similarly, the mushrikeen would gather in Mina and praise their forefathers, Allah is instructing them to praise Allah instead. (Ayat 196 - 200).
11. It is not important what amount is spent in the cause of Allah, rather it is the intention that really counts. (Ayat 215).
12. A person who leaves Islam, has all his/her deeds null and void and becomes worthy of jahannum. (Ayat 217).
13. The harms in gambling and alcohol outweigh the benefits, as they have an effect on the body, intellect, wealth, morality, and society. The prophet salAllahu alaihi wa sallam called alcohol "Umm ul khabaaith", i.e. the root of all evil/sins. (Ayat 219).
14. As the unit of a healthy society is a healthy family, there is guidance on marriage; it is not allowed to marry the mushrikeen, however there is some allowance for marrying women from the people of the book. However, the best thing is to marry true believers. The prophet salAllahu alaihi wa sallam mentioned that a righteous wife is like a treasure.(Tirmidhi).
15. Marital relations are prohibited during the wife's monthly periods, as this is unhealthy and can lead to the proliferation of disease. However, Islam guides us to the balanced attitude in this situation, where it is allowed to have some contact and keep in the company of the wife. (Ayat 222 - 223).

16. If someone swears an oath to stay away from his wife for 4 months, then after this period passes, this can result in divorce. However, if they reconcile within this period, then the man needs to pay the kuffarah (expiation). (Ayat 226 - 227).

17. This surah has more detail than any other surah with regards to divorce, suckling, and the iddah (period of waiting). Islam has kept the door of divorce open, as there can be circumstances when the family life is not reaching its desired objectives of creating a harmonious and healthy environment for its members. The guidance on divorce, also ensures that the woman is protected and not abused, as divorce cannot be revoked after a certain number of times, or a given period. Hence, the husband cannot abuse this institution.

18. Islam gives the woman the right to 'khula' i.e. to seek divorce. In this case the husband can take back the mahr (dowry - paid by the husband at time of marriage), as long as they both agree. (Ayat 230).

19. A woman can remarry the divorced husband, if she gets married to someone else and then gets divorced. Although, this should not be used as a means of simply remarrying the first husband.

20. The wife should not be taken back in order to inflict pain and torture. (Ayat 231)

21. In the face of divorce, the suckling babe has more right to be given suck by the mother.

22. In the face of divorce or the death of the husband the wife's waiting period is 3 monthly cycles, or, 4 months and 10 days, respectively. (Ayat 227 - 234).

23. It is not allowed to carry out a marriage contract during this waiting period, however there is no harm in showing a willingness or interest. (Ayat 235).

24. The believers are told not to refrain from Jihad and there are two related stories cited, from the previous nations :

a. A nation that fled its dwelling, due to the fear of a plague, but could not escape death. The lesson here is that you cannot escape the qadar (predestination).

b. Bani Israeel's story of Taluth and Galuth shows that a small number of believers can defeat a larger enemy by the Will of Allah.