

Which Way Should We Pray?

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“Turn then your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque; wherever you are turn, your faces in that direction.” (Holy Quran 2:144)

“From wherever you start forth, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque.” (Holy Quran 2:149 & 150)

There was a time when Muslims were living in peace and harmony. Everything was hunky dory for them. Praying was very simple and uncomplicated. If they were living in China, they would face west; if they were living in North Africa or Spain, they would face east; and if they were living in Central Asia, they would face south. It all changed with the discovery of the New World by Columbus. We found out that the world is not flat as we thought it should be, it was spherical. Living in the New World put us on the other side of the globe, but it did not absolve us of our obligations. Being a Muslim we must pray, but which way. Which way should we turn our face to gaze at the Kabah? There is a Jewish saying that if there are three Jews, there will be four opinions. We are not far behind. Like many other issues, we have difference of opinion on this issue.

Flatists:

On one side we have the Flatists. It does not mean they are flat footed, or have flat belly, in fact some of them carry a couple of tires with them. They are Flatists because they still believe that the earth is flat. If they had any doubt, Thomas Friedman has strengthened their belief by authoring “The World is Flat”. The book has sold in millions. How can so many people be foolish? The Flatists take the map they find in the bookstores, same place where they also find “The World is Flat” on the bookshelves. They place one dot on the place they live in, place another dot on Makkah and draw a straight line. For them that line becomes the direction of the Kabah. For Flatists living in USA and Canada, the Kabah is in the direction of Southeast.

Circlists:

On one other side we have the Circlists. It does not mean that they go around in circles, although if you hear them talk, they do go round in circles. They are super smart techies, who know that the earth is spherical. They trash out the maps and buy big globes. They place one dot on the place they live in, place another dot on Makkah and draw the greatest circle they can on the globe passing through the two dots. For them that line becomes the direction of Kabah. For Circlists living in USA and Canada, the Kabah is in the direction of Northeast.

Confusists:

In between them is me who is totally confused. Normally being a follower of the middle path, I will take an average of Northeast and Southeast and face towards East. Since I have a degree in science, I will be ridiculed by people I socialize with, if I give any credence to the Flatists’ point of view. The solution crafted by the Circlists looks very scientific, but I smell a rat. Of course if you are flying directly to Makkah, you will follow the same great circle, you are using to determine the direction of the Kabah. Actually I will not give much credit to the Circlist for coming up with this idea. It was the airline industry which came up with the idea of the great circle to save on fuel cost and the

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overtime paid to the pilots. For them the great circle is the shortest route, it takes less fuel and less time. The Circlists have only leveraged (another fancy term for stealing someone else's idea) their idea.

When we are in Makkah and stand in front of the Kabah, if I look straight, I will see the Kabah in front of me. If I am in Pakistan, and there is nothing between me and the Kabah, I will still see the Kaba, though I will need a Hubble telescope. The same thing is true for other places of the Old World. The New World is a different story. If I am living in the United States, if I look straight, whether I am facing Northeast or Southeast, I will never be able to see Kabah. When I am gazing straight past the horizon, my gaze is traveling in the space. Unlike the airplane, our stare will not travel along the surface of the earth to reach the Kabah. Thus when we are standing in prayer, does not matter whether we are Flatists or Circlist, we are gazing into the space, not at the Kabah. It will never find the Kabah, except if I am flying directly to Makkah in a plane. In that case I will be in Makkah and I do not have to worry about the direction anyway.

If we truly want to face the Kabah, we should drill a hole in the globe, which starts at the place we live and ends up at the floor of the Kabah. We have to be little careful though, we do not want to poke any hole in the ceiling of the Kabah This direction rules out the posture of standing in the prayer because this posture turns our face towards the infinite space, not the Kabah. We should start our prayers with Rku and end in Sajdah. While in Rku, we must tilt our face along the direction we have just drilled the hole. This posture would be similar to our posture when we are searching for our lost diamond ring or the contact lens on the floor. The same goes for Sajdah. This methodology will not only bring us in compliance with the Quranic injunction, it will also save us time, since standing is the most time consuming part of the prayer. I bet we can cut the time it takes to pray by half. This will also help the Arabically challenged, since we do not have to read any Surahs. This will also eliminate Traweeh, since without the Quranic recitation it loses its glamour. Imagine the manhours we will save in praying. It will help boost our economy, which is in dire straits these days. We don't need to worry about which way our foot should be, as long as we are gazing into the hole we have dug for ourselves.

About the Writer:

The writer has authored "Secrets of Angels, Demons, Satan, and Jinns – Decoding their Nature through Quran and Science," and "Atom to Adam – How, When and Where in the Light of Quran, Bible and Science (A Study of Human Origin)," both published by InstantPublishers.com (<http://instantpublisher.com/>) and "Lessons from the Qur'an," published by Ta-Ha Publishers (<http://www.taha.co.uk/>). These books are available from Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com/>) and Ta-Ha Publishers (<http://www.taha.co.uk/>), respectively. He has also published many essays on religious issues in the Charleston Gazette, West Virginia and written quite a few Islamic satires. He is a Chemical Engineer and possesses Master of Science degrees in Chemical Engineering and Chemistry and has Professional Engineers license from the State of Texas. His e-mail address is mnajawaid@yahoo.com.