13932 - Why Do Muslims Pray Towards The Ka`bah?

the question

I hope you can help me. I became a muslim a couple of years ago. My family is finding it hard to accept my ibada. But recently I have made a fuss about my salat and insisted I must pray. Alhamdulillah they have accepted it after seeing i became upset and depressed at living in a house where i was not allowed to practise my basic pillars of islam. They ask me questions (Alhamdulillah), of which one of them is "why do we face the Ka`bah if we are not worshipping it as we prostrate towards it?". I tried to explain that it is not the Ka`bah but Allah to whom we prostrate and the Ka`bah is for reasons of unity and that because it was the first house of Allah. I would be grateful if you could help me by explaining this further so i can understand it myself and explain this to my family and other kuffar. And also please can you make dua that they are guided on the right path

Summary of answer

We pray facing the direction of the Ka`bah in Makkah because Allah has commanded us to do that. If He had commanded us to pray facing in any other direction, we would have had to do that.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Submission to the Command of Allah; the essence of Servitude

Who has guided you to Islam; we ask Him to make you steadfast in it until you meet Him, for He is all Hearing, Ever Responsive. Praise be to Allah Who has made you keen to pray and to practise your religion openly. We ask Allah to guide your family and to grant you the joy of seeing them become Muslim... Amin.

With regard to our facing the Ka`bah, you should note, may Allah bless you, that in this universe there is none other than Creator and created, worshippers and the One Who is worshipped. The Creator and the One Who is rightfully worshipped is Allah alone; everything other than Him is created and worships Him either willingly and by choice – which is the case with the believers – or by force, which is the case of the disbelievers and sinners, whose submission to Allah consists of their being subjugated to His control, for they do not have to power to either benefit or harm themselves.

Allah is the One Who has given them life, and when He wills He will cause them to die. If Allah wills, He can make them sick, and if He wills He can heal them. He can make them rich whenever He wants and make them poor whenever He wants. Glory and praise be to Him, there is no Lord besides Him and none worthy of worship except Him.

With regard to his believing slaves, they are tried and tested in this brief, transient world. If they succeed in remaining steadfast in worshipping their Lord and attaining the highest degree of submission to Him, He will compensate them for that, by His kindness and grace, with Paradise in which there is that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and it has not entered the heart of man.

Among these tests is the fact that Allah commands them to do some things for which their minds cannot comprehend the wisdom behind them, they can only submit and obey. This is in order to distinguish those who are sincere in their claims to be believers from those who are insincere. For Allah is the Creator of reason, and He is the One Who issues the command, so whoever responds and submits, and says, “I hear and obey, even though I do not understand the reason, because I admit my mortality, my weakness and my submission to Allah, for Allah cannot be questioned as to what He does” – such a one is a believer who, it is hoped, will prosper and succeed in this world and in the Hereafter.

This is how the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were, as Al-Bukhari (1597) and Muslim (1270) narrated that `Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said of the Black Stone when he kissed it: “By Allah, I know that you are only a stone and you

can neither bring benefit nor cause harm. Were it not that I had seen the Messenger of Allah kissing you I would not have kissed you."

Significance of Facing the Ka`bah When Praying

So when we Muslims pray facing the direction of the Ka`bah, we do so because Allah has commanded us to do that. If he had commanded us to pray facing in any other direction, we would have had to do that. The same applies to many other acts of worship, We pray Dhuhr with four Rak`ahs and Maghrib with three and Fajr with two, because Allah has commanded us to do so.

We perform Tawaf seven times around the Ka`bah, and we stone the Jamarat seven times, and we do not do more than that under any circumstances. All of that is because that is what Allah has commanded us to do.

So whoever bears this thought in mind whilst doing these acts of worship will undoubtedly increase in submission to Allah; this will increase his faith and bring him closer to his Lord. Thus he will find great joy and immense happiness and deep contentment in his heart, which will make him long for worship and love it, because when he does acts of worship he will feel that he is doing them for Allah, and were it not for Allah, he would not do them.

So every act of worship brings him closer to Allah and increases him in faith until he meets Allah and Allah will honour him as He honours His righteous slaves.

But for the one who is stubborn and arrogant, and says, "I will not do it until I understand", this is like the devil who rebelled against Allah and said, as Allah tells us in the Quran (interpretation of the meaning):

{Shall I prostrate myself to one whom You created from clay?} [Al-Isra' 17:61]

This is sufficient to demonstrate the seriousness of arguing against the Shari`ah on the basis of reason. Rather Allah has described one of the most unique characteristics of the pious believers as being belief in the Unseen. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{This is the Book (the Quran), whereof there is no doubt, a guidance to those who are Al-Muttaqun [the pious believers of Islamic Monotheism who fear Allah much (abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds which He has forbidden) and love Allah much (perform all kinds of good deeds which He has ordained)]. Who believe in the Ghayb (the unseen) and perform the prayer, and spend out of what we have provided for them.} [Al-Baqarah 2:2-3]

So the first characteristic by which the believers are distinguished from others is the fact that they believe in the unseen or that which they cannot grasp, whether that is in a literal, physical sense or in a metaphorical, intellectual sense.

Distinguishing Islamic Worship from Idol Worship

What we should point out here is that our prayer facing the direction of the Ka`bah has nothing to do with the structure of the Ka`bah, rather it has to do with its location. If it were to be destroyed, we would still pray in that direction, not to that structure.

Hence we find that nowadays Muslims pray on the second storey and on the roof of the Grand Mosque in the Sanctuary of Makkah, facing the direction of the Ka`bah even though it is not directly in front of them. This is what millions of Muslims do throughout the world, praying in the direction of the Ka`bah even though they cannot see it.

This demonstrates the great difference between the laws of Islam and the actions of the polytheists whose worship of their idols, stones and trees ceases when these objects cease to exist. Therefore, if the polytheist cannot see his object of worship or idol, he does not face the direction of that thing.

We ask Allah to bestow upon us sincere faith, and to make us steadfast in it until we meet Him... Amin.

For more details, please see the following answers:

Situations in which the obligation to face the Qiblah is waived

What to Do If You Don't Know the Qiblah Direction

Accidentally Prayed in The Wrong Direction

Does Turning Away from The Qiblah Invalidate The Prayer?

And Allah knows best.