

Surah 2. Al-Baqara

Asad: And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way,¹¹⁸ so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you.¹¹⁹ And it is only to the end that We might make a clear distinction between those who follow the Apostle and those who turn about on their heels that We have appointed [for this community] the direction of prayer which thou [O Prophet] hast formerly observed: for this was indeed a hard test for all but those whom God has guided aright.¹²⁰ But God will surely not lose sight of your faith - for, behold, God is most compassionate towards man, a dispenser of grace.

Malik: We have made you a moderate Ummah (nation) so that you may testify against mankind and that your own Rasool may testify against you. We decreed your former Qiblah only to distinguish those who are the real followers of the Rasool from those who would back away from the faith. It was indeed a hard test except for those whom Allah has guided. Allah wants not to make your faith fruitless. Allah is Compassionate and Merciful to mankind.

Mustafa Khattab:

And so We have made you ?believers? an upright¹ community so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger may be a witness over you. We assigned your former direction of prayer only to distinguish those who would remain faithful to the Messenger from those who would lose faith. It was certainly a difficult test except for those ?rightly? guided by Allah. And Allah would never discount your ?previous acts of? faith. Surely Allah is Ever Gracious and Most Merciful to humanity.

Pickthall: Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you. And We appointed the qiblah which ye formerly observed only that We might know him who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels. In truth it was a hard (test) save for those whom Allah guided. But it was not Allah's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allah is full of pity, Merciful toward mankind.

Yusuf Ali: Thus have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced that ye might be witnesses over the nations and the Apostle a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qiblah to which thou wast used only to test those who followed the Apostle from those who would turn on their heels (from the faith). Indeed it was (a change) momentous except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people most surely full of kindness Most Merciful. ^{142 143 144 145 146}

Transliteration: Wakathalika jaAAalnakum ommatan wasatan litakoonoo shuhadaa AAala alnnasi wayakoona alrrasoolu AAalaykum shaheedan wama jaAAalna alqiblata allatee kunta AAalayha illa linaAAlama man yattabiAAu alrrasoola mimman yanqalibu AAala AAaqibayhi wain kanat lakabeeratan illa AAala allatheena hada Allahu wama kana Allahu liyuddeAAa eemanakum inna Allaha bialnnasi laraoofun raheemun

Author Comments

118 - Lit., "middlemost community" - i.e., a community that keeps an equitable balance between extremes and is realistic in its appreciation of man's nature and possibilities, rejecting both licentiousness and

exaggerated asceticism. In tune with its oft-repeated call to moderation in every aspect of life, the Qur'an exhorts the believers not to place too great an emphasis on the physical and material aspects of their lives, but postulates, at the same time, that man's urges and desires relating to this "life of the flesh" are God-willed and, therefore, legitimate. On further analysis, the expression "a community of the middle way" might be said to summarize, as it were, the Islamic attitude towards the problem of man's existence as such: a denial of the view that there is an inherent conflict between the spirit and the flesh, and a bold affirmation of the natural, God-willed unity in this twofold aspect of human life. This balanced attitude, peculiar to Islam, flows directly from the concept of God's oneness and, hence, of the unity of purpose underlying all His creation: and thus, the mention of the "community of the middle way" at this place is a fitting introduction to the theme of the Ka'bah, a symbol of God's oneness.

119 - I.e., "that your way of life be an example to all mankind, just as the Apostle is an example to you".

120 - I.e., "whom He has given understanding" (Razi). The "hard test" (kabirah) consisted in the fact that ever since their exodus to Medina the Muslims had become accustomed to praying towards Jerusalem - associated in their minds with the teachings of most of the earlier prophets mentioned in the Qur'an - and were now called upon to turn in their prayers towards the Ka'bah, which at that time (in the second year after the hijrah) was still used by the pagan Quraysh as a shrine dedicated to the worship of their numerous idols. As against this, the Qur'an states that true believers would not find it difficult to adopt the Ka'bah once again as their qiblah: they would instinctively realize the divine wisdom underlying this commandment which established Abraham's Temple as a symbol of God's oneness and a focal point of the ideological unity of Islam. (See also note [116] above.)

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i.e., moderate, balanced, and outstanding.

142 - Thus: By giving you a Qibla of your own, most ancient in history, and most modern as a symbol of your organisation as a new nation (Ummat).

143 - Justly balanced: The essence of Islam is to avoid all extravagances on either side. It is a sober,

practical religion. But the Arabic word (wasat) also implies a touch of the literal meaning of Intermediacy. Geographically Arabia is in an intermediate position in the Old World, as was proved in history by the rapid expansion of Islam, north, south, west and east.

144 - Witnesses: When two persons dispute, they advance extravagant claims. A just witness comes between them, and brings the light of reason to bear on them, pruning all their selfish extravagances. So the mission of Islam is to curb, for instance, the extreme formalism of the Mosaic law and the extreme "other-worldiness" professed by Christianity. The witness must be unselfish, equipped with first-hand knowledge, and ready to intervene in the cause of justice. Such is the position claimed by Islam among rival systems. Similarly, within Islam itself, the position of witness to whom disputants can appeal is held by Muhammad Mustafa.

145 - The Qibla of Jerusalem might itself have seemed strange to the Arabs, and the change from it to the Ka'ba might have seemed strange after they had become used to the other. In reality one direction or another, or east or west, in itself did no matter, as God is in all places, and is independent of Time and Place. What mattered was the sense of discipline, on which Islam lays so much stress: which of us is willing to follow the directions of the chosen Apostle of God? Mere quibbles about non-essential matters are tested by this.

146 - What became of prayer with the Jerusalem Qibla? It was equally efficacious before the new Qibla was ordained. God regards our faith: every act of true and genuine faith is efficacious with Him, even if formalists pick holes in such acts.

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