

The Moderate Ummah

و كذا لك جعلناكم أمة وسطا لتكونوا شهداء على الناس و يكون الرسول عليكم شهيدا

Thus We have made you the moderate Ummah, so that you can be witnesses over people, and the Messenger (peace be upon him) is a witness over you (2: 143).

What follows is in essence a three-part explanation (*tafsīr*) of a beautiful verse from Sūrah al-Baqarah, in which Allāh Almighty describes this blessed Ummah as the middle (*wasat*) one. A huge part of this paper has been taken from the inspirational works of Shaykh M Mutwalli al-Sha'rāwī (d. 1998). May Allāh shower his final resting place with His infinite mercy, āmīn.

و كذا لك جعلناكم أمة وسطا

Thus we have made you the moderate Ummah (2: 143)

Allāh describes this Ummah as the “*Wasata*” (أمة وسطا). *Wasat* translates as the middle, the moderate. Immediately, we learn that moderation is a favour from Allāh, for that is why Allāh mentions it.

Secondly, we as Muslims can only be in the ‘middle’, if extremes exist in the spectrum. Zaid can only say ‘this car has a moderate price’ if he has seen the prices of other cars and is able to compare it with cheaper and more expensive ones. Therefore, in order for moderation to exist, extremism must automatically exist too.

With this in mind, you will see that Islam is in the middle in all matters. Muslims are not extreme in any area. In the words of the Qur’ān, we are the occupants of the middle path, to the exclusion of other religions, cultures and civilisations. Consider the following examples:

- i. Islam is between those (i) who do not believe in a god at all (ii) who believe in multiple gods. Both positions are wrong. A simple wrist watch cannot exist except there is a creator for it, so what about the entire universe? Also, how can the *aqīdah* of multiple gods be correct? How do they share duties? Is one god more important than another? Islam is the middle path in between these extremes.
- ii. One major religion turned their prophet into a god. Then another assassinated their prophets (Qur’ān, 2: 61). We are in between the two and we occupy the middle path. We

respect our prophets immensely and hold them central to our *aqidah*. We will not tolerate any type of insult directed to these selected men of Allāh. But at the same time, Allāh is our Lord and no one else. We bow to Him alone. Imām al-Busīrī summed up this perfectly when he said:

دع ما ادعته النصاري في نبيهم
واحكم بما شئت مدحا فيه و احتكم

*Refrain from what the Christians claimed about their Prophet (i.e. trinity and divinity).
And (otherwise) say whatever you like in his ﷺ praise, keeping common sense in mind.*

iii. In our behaviour and outlook, we are again advised to adopt the middle path. Sayyidunā Luqmān advised his son: ‘O my beloved son! Do not be so sweet that you end up being swallowed; and do not be so sour that you end up being spat out.’

iv. Some religions and civilisations openly promoted the idea of celibacy. The other extreme is sexual freedom and cohabitation. Islam sits in the middle with marriage.

v. We are moderate in consumption. In simple terms, Allāh says ‘eat, drink but do not be wasteful (7: 31).’ Having access to an abundance of food, water and desserts does not give us the right to waste it. Waste is extreme, and Muslims do not do extremism.

لتكونوا شهداء علي الناس

So that you can be witnesses over the people

Importantly, this same verse continues with the news that because Muslims are the moderate people, they will be ‘witnesses over the people’. What does this mean?

Imam al-Sha’rāwī writes that it means that until the Day of Judgement, Muslims alone will be the true representatives of what constitutes moderation, for all of mankind to see. There will be a time of extremism. In this sensitive climate, people will become confused with regards to what is normal and abnormal, decent or indecent, too much or too little. At such a time, only Muslims will uphold the right criteria for moderation. Only Muslims will occupy the middle path. This path is the path of the Chosen One, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

That time of extremism has arrived. We are living in a time of extremism. Everything has become polemic:

-The gap between the rich and poor has become very extreme. There are 156 billionaires in the UK today. At the same time, 110,000 people die each year thanks to extreme poverty.

-Food consumption in society is becoming more and more extreme. According to a recent report, about one in four UK residents are obese. At the same time, people are starving. In 2023/2024, an estimated 2.98 million people in the UK used a food bank.

-News coverage is extreme today. The contrasting views, analysis and opinions on any given issue has never been greater. Extremist, racist, bigoted politicians are provided with ample airtime, to the exclusion of calm, moderate voices in the political scene.

So in such an extreme climate, who will people look up to to appreciate the middle path and true moderation? Only the Muslims. That is what is meant by ‘so that you can be witnesses over the people’.

From this, we see that Muslims have a moral, social and spiritual duty to occupy the middle path and refrain from any form of extremism. If we do not, then all of society will no longer have a blueprint for what constitutes moderation.

و يكون الرسول عليكم شهيدا

‘And the Messenger (peace be upon him) is a witness over you’

Occupying the middle ground is a very weighty responsibility upon the shoulders of Muslims. But Muslims *must* deliver and avoid extremism in all forms and shapes. And that is why the same verse finishes with a very strong statement from Allāh; that dear Muslims! Your Messenger ﷺ will be watching you at all times. He ﷺ will ensure you do not veer off the middle path. His teachings will suffice for a blueprint to the middle path. Study his life and one will appreciate his strict adherence to the middle path. For instance:

-Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

قال رسول الله ﷺ خير الامور أوسطها

‘The best matters are the moderate ones.’

-Jabir ibn Samurah reports that the Prophet's ﷺ prayer (*salāh*) and sermon were moderate, not too short and not too long. When it came to congregational prayers, he ﷺ was against long recitations and *tasbihs*.

-Extremism in worship (*ibāda*) is not even permitted. Even this is not Sunna. Three Companions (may Allāh be pleased with them all) vowed (i) to stay awake all night in worship (ii) fast for the rest of their lives (iii) refuse to marry. The Prophet ﷺ did not praise them but in fact corrected them.

Conclusion

Muslims have a very important, prophetic duty to adhere to the middle path. The best way to avoid extremism in all affairs is the Prophet's (peace be upon him) Sunna, who never showed extremism in any matter. More than ever before, this Sunna needs to be respected and implemented.

May Allāh enable us to adopt the middle path, the path of our Master, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, *āmīn*.

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