

### THE CONCEPT OF AL-WASATIYYAH AND THE PLACE OF ISLAMIC MODERATION IN IT

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#### **DEFINITION OF WASATIYYAH**

The term wasatiyyah is used in connection with the Qur'anic phrase "ummatan wasatan", which refers to the Universal Islamic Community or Nation having the attributes of JUSTICE, **EXCELLENCE** and **BALANCE** in order to serve as Allah's trustworthy "witnesses over mankind" in this world and in the Hereafter (Q. 2: 143). The term can also be translated as "Justly Balanced Quality" or "Justly Balanced Nature" of Islam and the Islamic community. The more popular translation of the term, however, is "MODERATION."

# WHY WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF WASATIYYAH IN THE CURRENT WORLD SITUATION

The phenomenon of religious extremism as well as religious liberalism, among some Muslim groups, has tarnished the image of Islam among non-Muslims in the West and the East. In this context, terms like Jihād and Sharī`ah have assumed negative connotations not only to the Western media and governments, but also to the ears of the Muslim secularists and liberalists.

# THE EMERGENCE OF MUSLIM MILITANT, DEVIANT OR SECTARIAN (SUCH AS SHĪ`AH) GROUPS, IN THE LAST THREE DECADES, IN SUNNI-DOMINANT COUNTRIES

To make matters worse, a new and countervailing social force consisting of liberalized and secularised elites has also appeared in some Muslim countries to popularise their own startling and anti-orthodox views of Islam in the name of democracy, basic human rights, individual freedom, and freedom of expression, moderation and rationalism. This has made it necessary for religious authorities and concerned Islamic scholars to promote the correct and balanced understanding of Islamic teachings in accordance with the tradition of AHL AL-SUNNAH WA AL-JAMAA`AH.. In the Malay-Indonesia Archipelago

#### UNDERSTANDING WASATIYYAH HOLISTICALLY

It should be made clear, however, that religious or cultural "MODERATION" is one important dimension of Qur'anic wasaţiyyah, but not the whole of it. Therefore we should be careful when we use the term wasatiyyah, not to confuse the part with the whole. Intellectual integrity and objective scholarship require that in the discourse on wasatiyyah, one should not forget to relate the qualities, attributes or values of "balance" or "moderation" to the basic qualities of JUSTICE (`adālah), EXCELLENCE/Best (khairiyyah) as explained by the well-established classical commentators of the Qur'an such as al-Tabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurtubī or Ibn Kathīr.

#### THE SYMBOL OF AL-WASAŢIYYAH- BY M.K.HASSAN



## THE QUR'ĀNIC MEANING AND CONNOTATIONS OF **WASAŢIYYAH**:

#### 1. JUSTICE ('ADĀLAH, 'ADL)

The term wasaṭiyyah is a verbal noun(maṣdar) from the word wasaṭ in the following āyah or verse of the Qur'ān:

"And thus we have made you a *JUST COMMUNITY* (or Justly Balanced or Middlemost Community) that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you." (Q. 2: 143)

From the above verse it is clear that the most important meaning of **WASATIYYAH** which makes the *Ummah* suitable to become "witnesses over mankind" is JUSTICE; which includes justice to Allah (S.W.T.), justice to the religion of Tawhīd (affirmation of the absolute and uncompromising oneness of Allah, His Dominion, Lordship, Knowledge and Power over the whole existence), justice to human beings and all creatures, justice to nature, and justice to oneself.

 Without this quality of comprehensive justice and fairness, the *Ummah* cannot be the witnesses against those peoples or human beings who have failed to fulfil the Divine Trusts placed upon their shoulders. It is reported by Imām Aḥmad on the authority of Abū Sa`īd al-Khuḍarī that the Prophet (Ṣ.'A.W.) interpreted the word "wasat" in verse 143 of Sūrah al-Bagarah(Q.2) to mean **JUSTICE** (al-'adl). Justice requires being in the middle-most position between two or more opposing sides, without inclining to or favouring any of the sides, and not swayed by emotions, biases or prejudice in making judgements, decisions or solving disputes. Hence the connotations of "BALANCE", "EQUILIBRIUM" or "MODERATION."

The Muslim Ummah being designated by Allah SWT as the "Just Community" is to uphold and preserve the pristine purity of the religion of *Tauḥīd*, and execute the commandments and Plan of Allah (S.W.T.), accompanied by a God-fearing mindset (tagwā), thereby becoming the most suitable witnesses over mankind regarding the integrity and purity of Allah's religion, Truth versus Falsehood, Good versus Evil, and the practice of true Balance and Moderation in this world and in the Hereafter.

Therefore when we discuss the topic of WASAŢIYYAH or ISLAMIC MODERATION or JUSTLY BALANCED NATURE of Islam, we should not lose sight of the obligation upon Muslims to become religious, moral and civilizational witnesses over mankind, with the attributes of justice and moral excellence as the fundamental qualities of the Muslim community.

## SOME QUR'ĀNIC PRINCIPLES REGARDING JUSTICE:

Believers are commanded by Allah (S.W.T.) to uphold justice even if it is against self-interest:

"O you, who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allāh, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allāh is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever acquainted with what you do." (Q. Al-Nisaa' 4:135)

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدُلِ وَ الْإِحْسَنِ وَإِيتَآيِ ذِى الْقُرْبَ وَيَا اللَّهُ يَا اللَّهُ وَالْمُنَكِ وَالْمُنَكِ وَالْبَغِي يَعِظُكُمُ وَيَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنَكِ وَالْبَغِي يَعِظُكُمُ لَكُمْ لَكُمَّ لَكُمُّ لَكُمُ لَتُكُمُ لَكُمُ لَلْكُمُ لَكُمُ لَكُولِكُمُ لَكُمُ لَكُمُ لَكُمُ لِكُمُ لَكُمُ لَكُم لَكُمُ لَكُم لَكُم لَكُم لَكُم لَكُ لَكُم لِكُم لَكُم لَكُمُ

"Indeed, Allah commands justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded." (Q. al-Nahl 16: 90)

## (2) EXCELLENCE, BEST, MOST PREFERRED AND GOODNESS (KHAIRIYYAH)

The Muslim community is commanded by Allāh (S.W.T.) to enjoin all that which is good/right (al-ma'rūf), and prohibit the bad/wrong/evil (al-munkar).

كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتَ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِأَلْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ كَالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عِلْقَةً وَلَوْءَامَنَ أَهْلُ ٱلْكِتَبِ عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِوَتُوْمِنُونَ بِأَللَّةٍ وَلَوْءَامَنَ أَهْلُ ٱلْكِتَبِ كَنَا لَهُمَّ مِّنْهُمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكَثَرُهُمُ مُ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِّنْهُمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكَثَرُهُمُ مُ اللَّهُ وَمِنُونَ وَأَكَثَرُهُمُ مُ اللَّهُ وَمِنُونَ وَأَكَثَرُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَمِنُونَ وَأَكَثَرُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَمِنُونَ وَأَكَثَرُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَمِنُونَ وَأَكَثَرُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَمِنْونَ وَاللَّالَ فَيَوْمِنَ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ مُنْ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ مُنْ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللْهُ وَاللَّهُ وَا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّالِلْمُوا لِلْمُوالِمُوالِمُواللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَالَ

"You are the **BEST COMMUNITY** brought fourth [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allāh. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient." (Q. 3: 110)

## وَلْتَكُن مِّنكُمُ أُمَّةُ يُدَعُونَ إِلَى ٱلْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْعَرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكُرِ وَأَوُلَيْهِ فَي اللَّهُ وَلَا يَكُن مُمُ المُفلِحُون اللهُ الْمُنكرِ وَأَوْلَيْهِ فَهُمُ الْمُفلِحُون اللهُ اللَّهُ الْمُفلِحُون اللهُ اللهُ المُفلِحُون اللهُ اللهُل

"And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful." (Q.3:104)

It may be useful to know that many works have already been written in many languages by Muslim scholars on this subject of "enjoining what is good/right and prohibiting what is bad/evil," because it is a very important tenet of Islam and a part of wasaṭiyyah. Below we reproduce the explanation given by Ibn Kathir in his commentary of Q. 2: 143

#### COMMENTARY OF IBN KATHIR

#### **The Virtues of Muhammad's Nation**

"Thus we have made you (true Muslims), a Wasaṭ (just) (and the best) nation, that you be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger (Muhammad SAW) be a witness over you."

Allah stated that He has changed our Qiblah to the Qiblah of Ibrahim and chose it for us so that He makes us the best nation ever. Hence, we will be the witnesses over the nations on the Day of Resurrection, for all of them will then agree concerning our virtue. The word Wasat in the Ayah means the best and the most honored. Therefore, saying that (the Prophet's tribe) Quraysh is in the Wasat regarding Arab tribes and their areas, means the best. Similarly, saying that Allah's Messenger(SAW) was in the Wasat of his people, means he was from the best subtribe. Also, 'Asr, the prayer that is described as 'Wusta' (a variation of the word Wasat), means the best prayer, as the authentic collections of Ahādīth reported. Since Allāh made this Ummah (Muslim nation) the Wasat, he has endowed her with the most complete legislation, the best Manhaj (way, method, etc.,) and the clearest Madhhab (methodology, mannerism, etc).

#### Allah said:

"He has chosen you (to convey His Message of Islamic Monotheism to mankind), and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship: it is the religion of your father Ibrahim. It is He (Allāh) Who has named you Muslims both before and in this (the Quran), that the Messenger (Muhammad (SAW)) may be a witness over you and you be witness over mankind!" (22:78)

Moreover, Imām Ahmad reported that Abu Sa 'īd narrated: Allah's Messenger (SAW) said:

يدعى نوح يوم القيامة, فيقال له: هل بلغت؟ فيقول: نعم, فيدعي قومه فيقال : ما أتانا من نذير وما أتانا من أحد, فيقال لنوح: من "لهم: هل بلغكم فيقولون يشهد لك ؟ فيقول: محمد وأمّته, قال فذلك قوله: (وكذلك حعلنكم امّة وسطا) قال: والوسط العدل, فتدعون فتشهدون له بالبلاغ ثمّ أشهد عليكم"

"Nuh will be called on the Day of Resurrection and will be asked," have you conveyed (the Message)?' He will say, 'Yes'. His people will be summoned and asked, 'Has Nuh conveyed (the Message) to you?' They will say,' No warner came to us and no one (Prophet) was sent to us.' Nuh will be asked, 'Who testifies for you?' He will say, 'Muhammad and his Ummah.'"

The Prophet said:

"The Wasat means the 'Adl (just). You will be summoned to testify that Nuh has conveyed (his Message), and I will attest to your testimony."

It was also recorded by Al-Bukhāri, At-Tirmidhi, An- Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah. Imām Ahmad also reported that Abu Sa 'īd Khudri narrated: Allah's Messenger (SAW) said:

" يجئ النّبي يوم القيامة ومعه الرجلان وأكثر من ذلك, فيدعى قومه فيقال : هل بلّغكم هذا؟ قيقال له : هل بلّغ هذ قومه؟ : هل بلغت قومك ؟ فيقول : نعم فيقال من يشهد لك؟ فيقول : محمد وأمته فيدعى محمّد وأمته فيقال لهم : هل بلّغ هذ قومه؟ فيقول : نعم فيقال : وما علمكم؟ فيقولون : جاءنا نبيّنا (ص) فأخبرنا أنّ الرسل قد بلغوا فذلك قوله عز وجل : ( وكذلك حعلنكم امّة وسطا) قال : عدلا ( وكذلك جعلنكم امة وسطا لتكونوا شهداء علي الناس ويكون الرسول عليكم شهيدا"

"The Prophet would come on the Day of Resurrection with two or more people (his only following!), and his people would also be summoned and asked, 'Has he (their Prophet) conveyed (the Message) to you? 'They would say, 'No'. He would asked, 'Have you conveyed (the Message) to your people? 'He would say, 'Yes'. He would be asked,' Who testifies for you?' He would say, 'Muhammad and his Ummah.' Muhammad and his Ummah would then be summoned and asked, 'Has he conveyed (the Message) to his people?' They would say, 'Yes'. They would be asked, 'Who told you that?' They would say, 'Our Prophet (Muhammad) came to us and told us that the Messengers have conveyed (their Messages')"

• Furthermore, Imam Ahmad reported that Abul-Aswad narrated: I came to Al-Madīnah and found that an epidemic had broken out that caused many fatalities. I sat next to 'Umar bin Al-Khattab once when a funeral procession started and the people praised the dead person. 'Umar said, "Wajabat (it will be recorded as such), Wajabat!" Then another funeral was brought forth and the people criticized the dead person. Again, 'Umar said. "Wajabat." Abul – Aswad asked, "What is Wajabat, O Leader of the faithful?" He said, "I said just like Allah's Messenger (SAW) had said:

"Any Muslim for whom four testify that he was righteous, then Allah will enter him into Paradise.' We said, 'What about three?' He said, 'And three. 'We said, 'And two?' He said, 'And two.' We did not ask him about (the testimony) of one (believing) person."

This was also recorded by Al-Bukhari, At-Tirmidhi, and An-Nasa'i.

(Source: Tafsir Ibn Kathir, (abridged), vol 1, 2000, PP.422-425)

## 3) BALANCED (TAWASSUT, TAWĀZUN, I'TIDĀL)

Balance or moderation in personal conduct and behavior is emphasized in several verses of the Qur'an, e.g.:

"And do not turn your cheek [in contempt] toward people and do not walk through the earth exultantly. Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful" (Q. 31: 18)

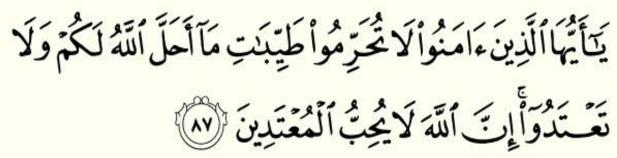
"And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys." (Q. 31: 19)

BALANCE BETWEEN OTHER-WORLDLY GOALS AND THIS-WORLDLY RESPONSIBILITY is underscored in the following verse:

وَٱبْتَغِ فِيمَاءَاتَىٰكَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلدَّارَ ٱلْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِن اللَّهُ الدَّارَ ٱلْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِن الدُّنيَا وَأَحْسِن كَمَا أَحْسَنَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ وَلَا تَبْغِ ٱلْفَسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿ اللَّهُ الللَّهُ اللَّهُ الللْمُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ الللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللللْمُ الللللْمُ اللَّهُ الللْمُ اللَّهُ اللللْمُ اللَّهُ الللللْمُ الللللْمُ اللللْمُ الللْمُ الللْمُ اللللْمُ الللْمُ اللْمُ اللللْمُ الللْمُ اللَّهُ الللْمُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللللْمُ الل

"But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters." (Q. 28: 77)

Balance in economic consumption is indicated in the following verses:



"O you who have believed, do not prohibit the good things which Allah has made lawful to you and do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors." (Q. 5: 87)

"And eat of what Allah has provided for you [which is] lawful and good. And fear Allah, in whom you are believers". (Q. 5: 88)

**BALANCE AND MODERATION** is also required in the **propagation of Islam**, with the emphasis on the use of wisdom, gentleness and rational arguments, as indicated in the following verse:

أَدْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِأَلِحَكُمَةِ وَٱلْمَوْعِظَةِ ٱلْحَسَنَةِ وَجَدِلَهُم بِٱلَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُو أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّعَن سَبِيلِةٍ وَهُو أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُهْتَدِينَ أَنْ

"Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided." (Q. 16: 125)

## EXTREMISM IN RELIGION PROHIBITED BY THE PROPHET (S.A.W.)

Sahih al-Bukhari: Volume 1, Book 2, Number 38:

عن أبي هريرة عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال إن الدين يسر ولن يشاد الدين أحد إلا غلبه فسددوا وقاربوا وأبشروا واستعينوا بالغدوة والروحة وشيء من الدلجة

Narrated Abu Hurairah:

The Prophet said, "Religion is easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, the nights."

(See Fath al-Bari, p.102, Vol. 1).

### GENTLENESS AND KINDNESS IN THE SUNNAH (1)

فحين اشتدت أم المؤمنين عائشة رضي الله عنها على اليهود الذين دخلوا على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم سابين له بصيغة التسليم فقالوا: السام عليك بدل السلام عليك، قال لها وهو فطن لما قالوه: يا عائشة إن الله رفيق يحب الرفق ويعطي على الرفق ما لا يعطي على العنف وما لا يعطى على ما سواه.

'A'isha, the wife of Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him), reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: 'A'isha, verily *Allah is kind and He loves kindness* and confers upon kindness which he does not confer upon severity and does not confer upon anything else besides it (kindness).

### GENTLENESS AND KINDNESS IN THE SUNNAH (2)

ومتمثلا أيضا قول النبي صلى اللهم عليه وسلم: (إن الرفق لا يكون في شيء إلا زانه ولا ينزع من شيء إلا شانه).

'A'isha, the wife of Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him), reported Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) as saying: *Kindness is not to be found in anything but that it adds to its beauty* and it is not withdrawn from anything but it makes it defective.

## EXTREMISM IN RELIGION PROHIBITED BY THE PROPHET (S.A.W.)

The Prophet (S.A.W) did not prohibit the good things (*al-tayyibat*) in this world for human consumption and physical wellbeing, but those good things were never a part of his primary concern as he preferred to live a life of simplicity, frugality, humility and moral restraint. In one of his famous supplications, the Prophet (S.A.W) showed his holistic and comprehensive vision of life, and proper attitude towards his religion (*al-din*), the world (*al-dunya*), the Hereafter (*al-akhirah*), life (*al-hayah*) and death (*al-mawt*):

"O ALLAH, IMPROVE FOR ME MY RELIGION WHICH SAFEGUARDS ALL MY AFFAIRS; AND IMPROVE FOR ME MY WORLDLY EXISTENCE FOR IN IT IS MY LIVELIHOOD; AND IMPROVE FOR ME MY HEREAFTER FOR TO IT IS MY RETURN; AND MAKE THIS LIFE AN INCREASE FOR ME IN ALL THAT IS GOOD; AND MAKE DEATH AS A RELIEF FOR ME FROM ALL THAT IS BAQ." cont...

The Prophet (S.A.W) used to urge his Companions to *STRIKE* THE PROPER BALANCE BETWEEN THEIR RELIGIOSITY AND THEIR WORLDLY AFFAIRS, AND BETWEEN THE LEGITIMATE PLEASURE OF THE BODY AND THE FELICITY OF THE SPIRIT.

Whenever he came to know that some of them were showing an excessiveness in one direction, he would, with his wisdom put them back on the evenly balanced path. Once he saw a Companion who was preoccupied with prayer, fasting and nightly vigils at the expense of his physical wellbeing, his wife and community. He said to him:

"VERILY, YOUR BODY HAS A RIGHT ON YOU, AND YOUR WIFE HAS A RIGHT ON YOU, AND YOUR VISITORS AND GUESTS HAVE A RIGHT ON YOU. THEREFORE GIVE TO EACH ONE THAT HAS A RIGHT UPON YOU HIS/HER RIGHT."

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#### cont...

However, when he witnessed some of the Companions enthusiastically waiting and desiring to get a share of the booty brought back by Abu `Ubaidah from al-Bahrain, he seized the opportunity to warn them of the "temptation of this world" (fitnat al-dunya) and its deceptions and illusions (al-ghurur), saying:

Rejoice (for a while) and become weary (after that). By Allah, it is not poverty that I am afraid f or you: I am afraid that material wealth (aldunya) would be spread over you abundantly as it spread over those before you. Then you will be competing with one another for it as they had competed for it, and then it will destroy you as it had destroyed them.

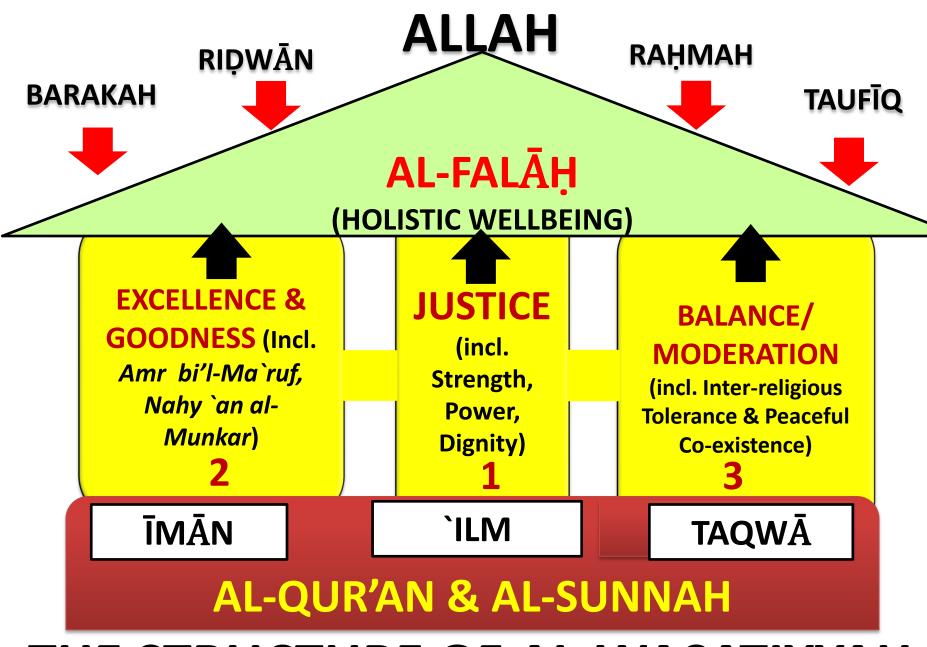
## MODERATION IS NOT AN EXCUSE OR JUSTIFICATION FOR MORAL LAXITY, UNETHICAL BEHAVIOUR OR LIBERALISM IN PERFORMANCE OF RELIGIOUS DUTIES

It should be pointed out that "Balance" or "Moderation", must not be misunderstood as justification for indulgence (*tasāhul*), carelessness or an excuse to be negligent in performance of religious obligations. With regard to performance of religious obligations, the nature of moderation in them is clearly defined and stated in the Sunnah (the normative statements and practices) of the Prophet (Ṣ.'A.W.).

It is, therefore, the duty of objective and qualified Muslim scholars to make the necessary corrections or clarifications. Otherwise, "moderation" could be understood as a license or permission given by religion to be lax in the performance of religious duties.

#### **GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT**

• From a comprehensive understanding of the concept of wasaṭiyyah as constitutive of the core qualities of JUSTICE, EXCELLENCE and BALANCE as mentioned above, it is possible to present the comprehensive and holistic meaning of the Qur'ānic concept in the following illustration, on the next page. It is our humble attempt to simplify the intellectual discourse on the concept and to convey its holistic and inter-related nature.



THE STRUCTURE OF AL-WASATIYYAH

In explaining the important concept of wasatiyyah, we should be careful not to emphasise one quality at the expense of other qualities, because those three qualities of JUSTICE, EXCELLENCE and BALANCE are in fact organically intertwined and integrated. We are not doing justice to the Divine principle of wasatiyyah if we choose to highlight only one aspect of its holistic meaning, namely "moderation" or "tolerance" to the detriment of other qualities, although the issue of moderation is highly relevant to the present global threats from religious extremism, xenophobia, exaggerated human freedom, ideological dogmatism, capitalistic consumerism or ethnic fundamentalism, in the West and in the East, or in the North and in the South.

In explaining or elaborating the concept of wasatiyyah, we believe it is important to remind our Muslim leaders and scholars not forget the issue of fulfilling the role of being A) "witnesses unto mankind" and B) "enjoining all that is good/right and prohibiting all that is bad /wrong" which are made obligatory upon the Muslim community, being Divinely designated as "The Just and Best Community brought forth for mankind." It should be remembered that the Prophet (S.'A.W.) had warned that dire consequences would befall Muslim communities who fail to fulfill or neglect the obligation of "enjoining all that is good/right and prohibiting all that is bad/evil".

#### CIVILISATIONAL WITNESSING (AL-SHUHÕD AL-HAÖĀRÔ )

To fulfill this key "civilisational witnessing" and leadership mission, the Muslim community has to also strive for comprehensive excellence in religious and worldly sciences, in the spirit of absolute and uncompromising monotheism (Tauhīd), fulfilling the Divine Trust (Amānah), performance of comprehensive worship of Allah ('Ibādah), vicegerency (Khilāfah) and desiring to spread the mercy of Allah (S.W.T.) to all the worlds (Rahmatan li al-`alamīn). This point has been stressed by innumerable reformist Muslim scholars over the centuries, particularly after the period of colonization by Western powers until the present.

#### **ISLAMIC MODERATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

With regard to the subject of Islamic moderation as one of the fundamental dimensions of wasatiyyah, it is instructive to study the phenomenon as an aspect of the Malay culture in Muslim Southeast Asia. We believe there are several aspects of Muslim culture and behavior in the Malay-Indonesian communities which reflect Islamic moderation, but they have not been getting the attention of the Western media in their desire to prop up the scripted narrative of Muslim extremism and militancy.

At this point it may be useful to study the results of an important international survey which was conducted to find out what the one billion Muslims really think about the West in 2009 (<a href="https://www.gallup.com/press/104209/Who-Speaks-Islam-What-Billion-Muslims-Really-Think">www.gallup.com/press/104209/Who-Speaks-Islam-What-Billion-Muslims-Really-Think</a>. Accessed 26 April 2011).

# THE MUSLIM-MALAY COMMUNITY AS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL MODERATION

Muslims around the world say that the one thing the West can do to improve relations with their societies is to moderate their views toward Muslims and respect Islam.



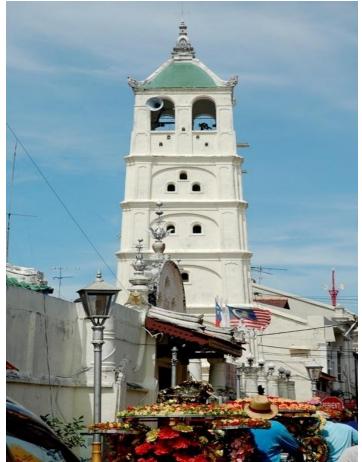
(www.gallup.com/press/104209/Who-Speaks-Islam-What-Billion-Muslims-Really-Think) -accessed 26 April 2011-

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Biggest Sleeping Buddha in S.E.ASIA in the "Verenda of Mecca"



## Chinese Style Minarets in Malacca





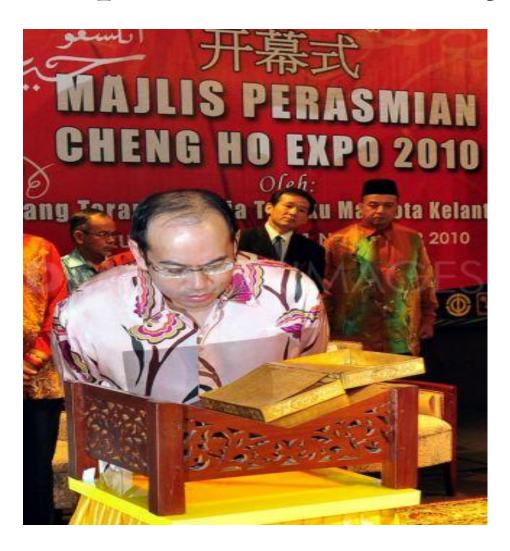
## Unique Chinese Mosque in Kelantan



# Gate to the Chinese Mosque in the "Verenda of Mecca"



#### Cheng Ho Expo in the "Verenda of Mecca"



# Gate to the Chinese Mosque in the "Verenda of Mecca"



Sharing of Political Power: Institutionalised and Indigenised Democracy since 1955

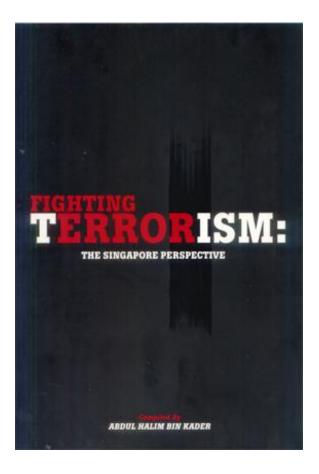


# Sharing of Power between Muslims and Non-Muslims





## MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN SECULAR SINGAPORE FIGHTING TERRORISM









In the Malay-Indonesian world, the Muslims have for a very long time been living together with non-Muslim minorities of various ethnic groups. They have learned to coexist harmoniously with the "others". They have also accepted the democratic political system adapted to local conditions, in which Islam is allowed – as in the case of Malaysia and, to a certain extent, in Indonesia – to play an important cultural and political role within the framework of the national constitution and national ideologies.

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It should be pointed out that the idea and practice of sharing political power between Muslims and non-Muslims is the hallmark of the Muslim community of Malaysia and Indonesia, while this would be seen as a novelty or impossibility in several Middle Eastern countries. In the case of the secular republic of Singapore, the minority Muslim community has also learned to adjust to the secularizing policies of the state, and while the religious leaders do not agree with some of the perceptions and prescriptions of the government from time to time, they have always lived and will continue to live in peace with their non-Muslim fellow citizens. However, since 9/11 Southeast Asian countries have witnessed the emergence of Muslim radicalism and militancy in Indonesia, Southern Thailand and the Philippines.

## Countering Extremist or Militant Tendencies among <u>Muslim Groups</u>

To assist the Muslim leaders and organizations in countering the militant or extremist tendencies among the youth or religious groups, we believe it is useful for them to consider undertaking what al-Qaraḍāwī has described as the seven necessary changes that Islamic movements and activists should undergo. (Al-Qaraḍāwī, al-Ṣaḥwah al-Islāmiyyah, pp. 10-52.They are as follows:

#### 1. Changing from Form and Outer Appearance to Reality and Substance

The substance of Islam is not about "growing the beard and lengthening it; shortening of the robe; carrying the *miswāk* (teeth-cleaning stick); joining one's foot with other's foot in prayer; placing the hands on the chest or above the navel; eating while seated not while standing; forbidding all kinds of songs or music; making the wearing of the *niqāb* (face cover) obligatory for women, etc." The substance of Islam as an 'aqīdah is Tawḥīd, that of 'ibādah is sincerity, that of mu'āmalah (transaction) is truthfulness, that of khuluq (character) is mercy, that of tashrī' (legislation) is justice, that of 'amal (work) is perfection, that of adab (ethics) is spiritual consciousness, that of 'alāqah (human bonds) is brotherhood, and that of civilization is balance.

## 3. FROM SENTIMENTAL (`ĀŢĬFĬYYAH) AND CLAMOUROUS BEHAVIOUR (GHAWGHĀĬYYAH) TO RATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC ATTITUDE

It is true that being sentimental or emotional is a common trait of being human, but this trait should not be allowed to dominate over the intellect or reason. Allah (S.W.T) demands His servants and vicegerents always to be just in dealing with fellow creatures and not to be influenced by the destructive emotion of base desires:

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to Allah, even as against

yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) the rich or the poor, for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve, and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquanted with all that you do.(Q. Al-Nisa' 4: 135)

In this regard Muslims need to change from the emotional thinking and behaviour syndrome to the realistic, neutral, objective and rational attitude" (al-nazÑah al-ÑaglÉniyyah almawÌË'iyyah al-ÍiyÉdiyyah al-wÉqiÑiyyah) in assessing matters, evaluating works, interpretation of events, interpretation of history, perceiving of supporters and adversaries, defining of positions to be taken and in decision making.(p. 106.)

# 5. CHANGE FROM BIGOTRY (*AL-TAÑAØŞUB*) AND EXCLUSIVISM (*AL-INGHILĀQ*) TO FORBEARANCE (*AL-TASĀMU*×) AND INCLUSIVISM (*AL-INŢILĀQ*).

Ibn Taymiyyah explains that an absolutist fanatical attitude towards a group, regardless if the group is right or wrong, is a *JÉhiliyyah* characteristic which is condemned by the Prophet (Ş.ÑA.W)( "He is not one of us who calls to group fanaticism, or fights in the name of group fanaticism (*Ñalabiyyah*).

xadÊth reported b AbË DÉ'Ëd, but the isnÉd is weak). This is different from the act of helping the victims of injustice or preventing the unjust person from committing injustice — an act that is encouraged in Islam. Therefore the fanaticism that is blameworthy (al-taÑallub al-madhmËm) or bigotry is the kind of blind fanaticism towards one's beliefs, or school of thought or one's ideas and opinions, or one's community or group, to the point that one does not accept any dialogue with those holding different views and shut all doors of peaceful interaction or communication.

## 6.CHANGE FROM VIOLENCE AND RANCOUR TO GENTLENESS AND COMPASSION

The methodology of Islamic propagation is based on gentleness (al-rifq). ("Verily AllEh is gentle; He loves gentleness in all affairs." xadith reported by Muslim on the authority of Nāishah. See Şalih Muslim, ladith number 2593., p. 279). Tenderness (al-IEn), graciousness (al-riggah), compassion (al-ralmah), dialogue in the best possible manner with "the other", are part of the religion of compassion (dEn al-ralmah). Therefore Muslims who use violence in promoting the cause of Islam are in fact violating the teachings of Islam and do great disservice to it. Unfortunately groups which espouse the use of violence in the name of Islam have appeared in Muslim countries and one of the reasons for the emergence of this phenomenon — dubbed as "Neo-KhawEErij" by al-QaralāwE is traceable to their faulty and defective understanding of jihEd (khalal fE figh al-jihEd), changing wrongdoings by force (figh taghy Er al-munkar bi-al-quwwah), fighting or revolting against the rulers (figh al-khurūj NalĒ al-lukkĒm) and accusing others of disbelief (figh al-takfīr).

#### FAULTS IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF JIHĀD.

Those who espouse the violent approach are mistaken in assuming that it is obligatory to fight the disbelievers even though they are at peace with the Muslims. In this regard they are guilty of transgressing the limits imposed by AllÉh (S.W.T), as stated in the Qur'Én, "... And fight in AllÉh's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit agression, for verily AllÉh does not love aggressors."(Q. Al-Baqarah2: 190.) This verse, contrary to the claim of some of the militants, is not abrogated and the categorical statement that "verily AllÉh does not love aggressors" is a permanent principle in Islam.

(This is affirmed by Ibn Taymiyyah in his "QÉÑidaḥ fÊ QitÉl al-KuffÉr" (The Principle in Fighting the Disbelievers). Al-QarÉÌÉwÊ, al-Ṣalwah al-IslÉmiyyah, p. 299.) It is true, however, that the Muslim Ummah was given permission by AllÉh (S.W.T) to fight (qitÉl) those who aggressed against the Muslims, or transgressed against their holy places or against the weak or oppressed servants of AllÉh (S.W.T) as indicated by the following verses:

# CHALLENGES: UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL CONTEXT

THE CHALLENGE OF INFLUENCES FROM ENLIGHTENED OUTSIDE & INSIDE LEADERSHIP FORMATION **MUSLIM COMMUNITY** THE CHALLENGE OF COMPASSIONATE POLITICAL CULTURAL & RELIGIOUS BIASES DAWAH HOLISTIC RELIGIOUS **DYNAMIC & EDUCATION** 58

# NEGATIVE INFLUENCES FROM OUTSIDE & INSIDE

How to control negative religious or secular influences coming from outside with special focus on the INTERNET & the new social network in Cyberspace.

## POLITICAL, CULTURAL & RELIGIOUS BIASES

How to engage political, religious or cultural biases and misconceptions of the Western or local media or state agencies.

## DYNAMIC & HOLISTIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

How to make religious education of the younger generation a source of spiritual enlightenment and social harmony and integration

# THE CHALLENGE OF COMPASSIONATE DA`WAH

How to make Islamic da`wah an aspect of Raḥmatan li'l-`Ālamīn and good deeds of Muslims as assets, not liabilities. Da`wah bi al-Ḥāl

# THE CHALLENGE OF ENLIGHTENED LEADERSHIP FORMATION

How to produce good leaders with sound Islamic knowledge, socio-economic and political skills and excellent moral integrity.

#### CONCLUSION

- ✓ The development and growth of democratic institutions and political culture in ASEAN , together with the proper understanding and implementation of the principles of Islamic moderation , we believe, would ensure a more peaceful environment for all the peoples of Southeast Asian nations. In this regard, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore are in a better position to realize the goal of peaceful co-existence and interreligious tolerance in the long run, because of the dominance of the mainstream tradition of moderation based on the harmonious fusion of Malay-Javanese culture and teachings of Islamic moderation.
- ✓ The other countries in ASEAN may need a longer period of gestation before the Muslim sense of alienation and minority insecurity in Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos could be ameliorated through the politics of accommodationism, peaceful resolution of conflicts and justice.
- ✓ The establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015 would perhaps be the beginning of regional and multilateral politics of moderation to be practiced by civilian political leadership of all the ASEAN nations.

- ✓ For this transnational and transcultural moderation to succeed in ASEAN and, indeed, in all Asian countries, leaders of all religious communities, not just Muslims, must be able to curb any rising trend of religious fundamentalism or aggressive evangelization into Muslim societies, as well as the trend of assertive or uncompromising secularism, or the movement which promotes exaggerated liberalism and freedom of individuals or groups in the name of democratic and fundamental human rights.
- ✓ As for Muslim political and non-political elites, their emphasis on moderation by Muslims should not lead to the dilution of the meaning and reduction of the scope of wasaṭiyyah for it stands for comprehensive and holistic excellence of the Muslim community, while Islamic moderation is a part of the holistic mission to actualize justice, excellence and balance. More study and research should be conducted by those elites towards closing the gap between words and deeds, rhetorics and substantive achievements, and ideals and realities.

At any rate, the emergence of the discourse on wasaṭiyyah and moderation has made it more imperative for Muslims to review their covenant with Allah (S.W.T.) in light of the Divine commandment for Muslims to exemplify holistic and civilizational excellence.



## MODERATION

Only actions give life strongth; only moderation gives it also in-

ALTER PRINT HAVE STORY



THANK YOU