

# Is Islam a Religion of Moderation or Extremism? A Study of Key Islamic Teachings

Thameem Ushama<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Correspondence: Thameem Ushama, Jalan Sungai Pusu, 53100 Gombak, P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Malaysia. Tel: 60-3-6196-5550. E-mail: ushama\_thameem@yahoo.co.uk; thameem@iiu.edu.my

Received: January 21, 2014 Accepted: February 12, 2014 Online Published: March 26, 2014

doi:10.5539/ass.v10n8p184 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n8p184>

## Abstract

This article strives to present a brief analysis of Islamic religious sources and examines whether the claim that Islam is immoderate is true or false, especially in relation to the method of moderation applied in religious teachings, requirements and human relations and substantiates that it is a religion of flexibility, goodness, ease, moderation and not extremism. It employs content analysis of relevant verses of the Scripture and statements of the Prophet that refer to the method of moderation and explanations of selected Qur'ānic exegetes. It focuses on understanding the concept of moderation and explains important terms (1) Excessiveness or Extremism, (2) Laxity, Negligence or Harshness and (3) Straight Path that lead to understand the proper meaning of moderation. It also explores its most significant features such as (1) Excellence or Goodness, (2) Justice, (3) Ease and Removal of Hardship, (4) Wisdom (5) Straightness and (6) Between Two Things and lastly it provides the conclusion and recommendations.

**Keywords:** moderation, extremism, ease, middle, justice and excessiveness

## 1. Introduction

Discourses are held on Islam-the religion of Muslims, its nature and characteristics since the inhumane incident of 9/11. It has been observed that some lead to positive images about Islam but most of them give rise to negative perceptions. Indeed, it is the claim of Muslims that Islam is truly peaceful, just and moderate. But a considerable number of people disagree with this phenomenon and tend to believe that Islam is unjust, unkind, unfair, uneasy, immoderate, extreme, militant, intolerant and even hostile. Not only this, they spread their own version and interpretation of Islam and present Muslims as uncooperative to new developments. Often, cynical remarks are made about the role of Muslims in humanity. Intellectual dissensions are generated amidst common people who are unaware of the true message of Islam, its laws, worldview, culture and civilization. Islamic religious teachings are believed to be even fostering terrorist motives. The media is engaged in perpetuating controversies, disseminating unfair interpretations and nurturing negative attitudes towards Islam. Tireless efforts are made in producing films and cartoons portraying Muslims as a violent prone community.

Thus, Islam has become a misunderstood religion today. The role of Islamic religious leadership is suspected. Islamic organizations' socio-cultural activities are under scrutiny. Islamic religious institutions are labeled to be untrustworthy in producing moderate human beings. Likewise, there are several misconceptions about Islam due to the distorted picture painted by irresponsible forces. Hence, these negative observations warrant rational response with authentic evidence from the early Islamic religious sources to correct their misgivings and misconceptions.

Thus, this article strives to present a brief analysis of the two fundamental Islamic religious sources: the Qur'ān-the Muslim Scripture (henceforth, the Scripture) and the statements of Muhammad-the Prophet (peace is upon him) of Islam (henceforth, the Prophet) chosen by God. It particularly examines whether the claim that Islam is immoderate is true or false, especially in relation to the method of moderation applied in Islamic religious teachings, legal and moral requirements and human relations. Relevant Prophetic Traditions are referred to in order to substantiate that Islam is the religion of flexibility, goodness, ease, moderation and not extremism.

The methodology applied in this study is qualitative. As such, it employs content analysis of relevant verses of the Scripture and statements of the Prophet that refer to the method of moderation in religion, followed by the explanations of selected Qur'ānic exegetes, both classical and contemporary. The scope of this study is limited to articulations of prominent exegetes and scholars such as al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qāsimī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Sa'dī, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Sayyid Quṭb, Maududi, Muhammad Asad, Daryabadi and others.

The first section of the article commences with a brief discourse on 'moderation' in light of the Scripture and the early literature that contains Muslim Prophetic Traditions, inclusive of the historical background that led to unpleasant situations in the Muslim community over the centuries. The second section focuses on understanding the concept of moderation in accordance with the Scripture. The third section explains and illustrates three important terms (used in the Scripture) that lead to the meaning and significance of moderation in religion: (1) Excessiveness or Extremism, (2) Laxity, Negligence or Harshness and (3) Straight Path. The fourth section explores the significant features of moderation in religion such as (1) Excellence or Goodness, (2) Justice, (3) Ease and Removal of Hardship, (4) Wisdom, (5) Straightness and (6) Between Two Things while the last section provides the conclusion and recommendations.

## 2. Moderation in Islam

Deriving from the trilateral Arabic word *wa sa ṭa*, Muslim scholars use the term *Wasaṭiyyah* to refer to the concept or method of moderation in Islam. According to the Muslim belief, God revealed the Scripture for man's guidance whose aim is to liberate him from the darkness of ignorance to illuminate light of Truth, thus requiring him to apply the method of moderation as the significant source and essence of guidance in all walks of life. According to Muslim religious thinkers and Qur'ānic exegetes, moderation is not confined to partial implementation or enforcement of Islamic religious teachings or rulings or systems but it is a comprehensive method to be applied in every aspect of life by every individual or group or nation. Indeed, Islam is entirely based on the method of moderation which is explicit from the discourses conducted by Muslim scholars based on the Scripture and Prophetic Traditions. Whosoever among Muslims neglects moderation as a reality; he is regarded as neglecting reality of the Scripture and its holistic feature. The need and modality of the method of moderation are referred to in the Scripture in a number of places in relation to creed, acts of devotion, confession, legal rulings, commanding good and forbidding evil, struggle in the cause of God, human relations and morality, acquisition of wealth and its expenditure and accountability of the soul and its passions.

According to the Muslim belief, God commands the believers to be conscious and fearful of Him in upholding the truth and not die as infidels but as Muslims with absolute submission and subservience to His will (Qur'ān, *Āl Imrān*, verse no. 102). God also commands people to revere and fear Him Who created man from a single soul, from it his spouse and from the two, numerous men and women (Qur'ān, *al-Nisā'*, verse no. 1). God further commands His believers to be fearful of Him, speak the truth with modesty and politeness that will reform people and their deeds and He assures that He will forgive their sins and declares that whosoever obeys Him and His Messenger will attain great felicity (Qur'ān, *al-Aḥzāb*, verse no. 70-71).

It is mentioned in the Scripture that among the foremost of God's bounties to the Muslim community is its recognition as *Ummatan Wasaṭan* as stated in a verse, implying that the Muslim community is the 'justly balanced community' or 'middle nation' or 'moderate nation.' God also accords due recognition that this community is the best among mankind, for it propagates righteousness, forbids viciousness and believes in God-the absolute, acknowledging Him as the only Master and Law-giver. This verse (Qur'ān, *Āl Imrān*, verse no. 110) of the Scripture conditions that this community is regarded as the best only when it implements the method of moderation in all walks of life. This implies implicitly that if the Muslim community is not moderate, it is not acknowledged as the best, according to the views of the exegetes of the Scripture. In other words, this verse demonstrates that the Muslim community is moderate in all dimensions and should be moderate, regardless of differences of views, interpretations and circumstances.

God chose Muhammad as His Messenger who is regarded as the role model by the Muslim community because he was endowed with noble qualities and characteristics. Not only this but God sent down the most noble and sacred Scripture to him and made it as the supreme guide with clarity as compared to scriptures revealed earlier, embracing the best out of what came before. Through revelation of the Scripture and raising Muhammad as the Messenger, God honored and ennobled this community by offering His comprehensive guidance, bestowing His benevolence, showing His mercy and acknowledging them as the best among mankind, implying that they are supposedly the balanced and just community, i.e. moderate community.

The Muslim community has been inspired to attain felicity with its absolute submission to God and obedience to

His Messenger's Patterns and gifted with holistic guidance, theoretically, dogmatically, spiritually, jurisprudentially, socially, morally and practically. The companions of the Messenger, the Successors and the Followers of the Successors faithfully adhered to the principles and essentials of religion with sincerity, perfection, equilibrium and excellence.

As mentioned in a Prophetic Tradition, scriptural interpretations of the first three generations of Islam are the prime source of the Muslim community, as they associated themselves with goodness and fully held fast together to the Scripture of God and the Patterns of Muhammad-the Prophet (Al-Bukhārī, 1986, Vol. 5, p. 2). As the first three generations were committed to following the pure and undistorted messages of the Scripture and the Prophet, they are regarded as the prime source as well as the choice of the Muslim community in all time and circumstances and are regarded as the best and balanced with justice and moderation, as they upheld the true understanding and application of the Divine message without doubts, dissensions, deviations, digressions, distortions, conflicts and controversies.

After the demise of the Prophet, the period of the three caliphs passed by with no major challenges, creedal or doctrinal. The period of the fourth caliph ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, however, was marked with a difference. Differences of interpretation of concepts surfaced towards the end of his caliphate with the emergence of new religious sects with discords and civil strife. Later, a number of innovations emerged that further led to the development of other denominations and sub-sects. Then, the generations that came after it, consciously or unconsciously, inherited doctrinal and behavioral innovations and superstitions from the early Islamic society. Gradually, the people deviated from the proper understanding of Islam based on the Scripture and distanced themselves from the method of moderation and intermediateness which is strongly advocated in the Scripture and manifested in the traditions and practices of the Prophet. It is regretful to note that the Muslim community of today is experiencing a number of serious crises in this era of globalization and Post Modernism where the world is undergoing various trials and tribulation due to the absence of ethical consciousness and belief in accountability to God in the final analysis. One of the manifestations of the crises of the Muslim community of today is disunity which occurs due to differences of opinion in interpreting religious texts, doctrines and legal rulings.

Due to differences, immoderation or excessiveness and negligence and exceeding proper bounds in some religious matters, harshness and immoderateness are observed in approaches, methods and practices of the Muslim community. Thus, Muslim reformists and revivalists endeavor and address the realistic situations of the Muslim community and prescribe solutions and remedies for success, realizing the causes of their failures and maintaining steadfastness in elevating humanity from ignorance to civilization and from error to guidance. In the process of this exercise, excessiveness is also observed. In addition, elements of exaggeration, extremism and revival of the thoughts of Khārijites among reformists and Muslim propagandists are also noticed. Lack of genuine Islamic religious spirit and consciousness as well as erosion of the fundamentals of Islamic creed while dealing with people without purifying them and educating them the Scripture of God and the Patterns of the Prophet are also detected.

Amidst such trends among Muslim reformists and propagandists, there emerged a few groups studying the external influence, reviewing the methodology and leading people to the right path on the basis of the methodology of the righteous early Muslim society that followed the Patterns of the Prophet and the righteous ancestors of the Muslim community, safeguarding the religion from extremist tendencies of deviationists and sectarianism. Amidst such phenomena of extremism and deviationists' thoughts, the need was felt to guide the Muslim community towards the right path with balanced approach and dynamic methodology to rescue it from its failure, to awaken it from its slumber and to remind propagandists and reformists to apply the right methodology and clear explanatory paths as stipulated in the Scripture and the Patterns of the Prophet.

An overview of Islamic teachings portrays that the method of moderation exists in the religion from all perspectives, inclusive of principles, essentials, doctrines, creed, worship, morality, worldview and practice. In other words, the method of moderation is explicit in the Scripture with unique styles, explaining the good and evil, righteousness and viciousness and its advantages for the Muslim community and humanity as a whole. There are also Prophetic Traditions that emphasize the method of moderation, its features and its need in the individual and collective Muslim life. But people especially the so-called 'Others' misunderstand it and, hence, the methods of moderation as explicated in the Scripture and the Patterns of the Prophet are discussed below.

### 3. The Muslim Scripture on Moderation

According to al-Ṭabarī, the famous exegete, the Arabic term *wasāṭ* that appears in the Scripture refers to justice. He argues based on his channels of transmission tracing to the Prophet of Islam while defining verse *al-Baqarah*: 143 of the Scripture that the Arabic term *wasāṭan* refers to 'just' or 'equitable' or 'fair' (Al-Ṭabarī, 1373AH, Vol.

2, p. 2). Al-Qurṭubī also states that this Arabic term *wasat* refers to justice (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964, Vol. 3, p. 383). Al-Ṭabarī mentions that this verse was interpreted by the companions of the Prophet and the Successors such as Ubayy, Saʿīd, Muḥāhid and others who also explained the Arabic term *wasatan* as referring to justice (Al-Ṭabarī, 1373AH, Vol. 2, p. 7). In addition, al-Ṭabarī elucidates that the term *wasat* refers to ‘the best’ (Muḥammad, 1996, p. 6). Thus, it can be inferred that ‘so and so is the best of the noble descent in his tribe,’ means the average of the descent. The purport, in this context, is that he is moderate in his tribe and intermediate in his approaches. Hence, the term *Ummatan Wasatan*, according to the above mentioned exegete, refers to ‘just community.’

Commenting on verse *al-Baqarah*: 143 of the Scripture, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā interprets it by referring to another verse of *al-Baqarah*: 213 that convey that God, the Almighty guides whomsoever He wishes. This implies that God made this community of believers as a ‘justly balanced nation’ (*Ummatan wasatan*) towards the direction of Divine guidance. It is said that the term *wasat* used in the Scripture refers to ‘just’ and ‘best’ (Muḥammad, 1996, p. 6). This means that excessiveness in anything or any matter is immoderation or transgressing the bounds and the decrease of it is negligence or laxity. Both are undesirable and harmful; they are evil and blameworthy; they are disliked and rejected and the best is the ‘middle’ way between the two limits, i.e. intermediate between the two (matters). In his interpretation, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saʿdī holds the same view that *wasatan* mentioned in verse *al-Baqarah*: 143 of the Scripture refers to ‘just’ and ‘best’ (Al-Saʿdī, 2002, p. 157). Contemporary Qur’ānic exegetes also present their views in relation to the meaning of this Arabic term *wasat* mentioned in the Scripture. Sayyid Quṭb presents his argument. “The Arabic term *wasat*, used in this verse to describe the global Muslim community, is a vivid epithet which evokes a much wider range of meaning than is given by its literal equivalent of ‘middle’. The term is used here in a very broad sense. Thus, the Muslim community or *Ummah* to use the Qur’ānic term is a middle of-the-road community which stands witness against other nations and communities in the sense that it upholds and defends justice and equality for all people” (Quṭb, n. d., Vol. 1, pp. 148-149). Sayyid Quṭb offers additional interpretation. “The Muslim community is balanced in the sense that it is not rigid or dogmatic... It is an open society that welcomes new ideas and learns from the work and experience of other societies, cultures and civilizations. Its main objective is to seek the truth, wherever that may come from and to adopt it with courage and confidence. Balance and moderation are clear in the way Muslim society is run and organized. It is neither a permissive, undisciplined community nor a regimented one run by brute force or rigid rules. It is a society raised on learning, education and rich cultural and social traditions” (Quṭb, n. d., Vol. 1, pp. 148-149). Muhammad Asad remarks “that ‘middlemost community’ refers to 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’ān exhorts the believers not to place too great an emphasis on the physical and material aspects of life, 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” (Asad, 1984, p. 30).

According to Maududi, “the term *Ummatan wasatan* which has been translated into “a Community of the Golden Mean” is so comprehensive in meaning that no English word can correctly convey its full sense. It is a righteous and noble community which does not go beyond proper limits, but follows the middle course and delays out justice evenly to the nations of the world as an impartial judge, and bases all its relations with other nation’s truth and justice” (Maududi, 1983, Vol. 1, p. 120).

Daryabadi articulates that “*Ummatan wasatan* are people who have hit the golden mean; not inclined to either extreme; well poised in every virtue: A nation conforming, or conformable, to the just mean; just; equitable” (Daryabadi, 1971, Vol. 1, p. 23(B)). The early Islamic literature contained many Prophetic Traditions on the significance of the method of moderation in religion. In every respect, Muslims are commanded to adopt, uphold and apply the method of moderation. This goes without saying that Islam never advocates extremism under any circumstance. One such example for moderation is recitation of the Scripture in Muslim devotional rites and rituals or prayers. To quote a Prophetic Tradition: “Ibn ‘Abbās reported: The word of (God) Great and Glorious: “And utter not thy prayer loudly, nor be low in it” (17: 110) was revealed as the Messenger of God was hiding himself in Mecca. When he led his Companions in prayer he raised his voice (while reciting the Qur’ān). And when the polytheists heard that, they reviled the Qur’ān and Him Who revealed it and him who brought it. Upon this God, the Exalted, said to His Apostle: Utter not thy prayer so loudly that the polytheists may hear thy recitation and (recite it) not so low that may be inaudible to your Companions. Make them hear the Qur’ān, but do not recite it loudly and seek a (middle) way between these. Recite between loud and low tone” (Muslim, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 120).

The Prophetic Tradition cited above provides evidence that God wanted His Prophet to be moderate in his recitation of the Scripture. It also inspires Muslims to apply the method of moderation in reciting verses from the

Scripture in their daily prayers. This command of God draws the attention of Muslims to realize the significance and necessity of applying moderation in all aspects of life. Even though one reflects enthusiasm and ardent desire for religious ritual, he is not allowed to be extreme or obsessed but follow the middle path as stipulated in the Prophetic Tradition. If this is the Prophet's command in relation to recitation in prayers, then contemplate the consequences when people are inclined to immoderation in other things that are not related to spiritual matters. Some other Prophetic Traditions are also recorded regarding the method of moderation. The following is cited to strengthen the present analysis of moderation and its meaning. "On the authority of Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, the Prophet said, we were with the Prophet (saw) and he drew a line (in the sand), then he drew two lines to its right and two to its left. Then he put his hand on the middle line and said: 'This is the path of Allah.' Then he recited verse 153 of *Sūrat al-An 'ām* (of the Qur'ān) which reads as 'Verily, this is My Way, leading straight: follow it: follow not (other) paths: they will scatter you about from His (great) path: thus doth He command you that ye may be righteous.' The *wasat* here is a thing between two things, i.e. middle between the two" (Ibn Mājah, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 2).

#### 4. Understanding the Important Terms in Relation to Moderation

According to Islamic religious teachings, it is essential that moderation fulfills two criteria: Excellence or Goodness and Between Two Limits. If we wish to comprehend the in-depth meaning and application of moderation, there are terms that must be explained in advance in order to underline its scope and significance. They are (1) *ghulūw* or *ifrāt*, (2) *jafā'* or *tafrīt* and (3) *al-Širāt al-mustaqīm*. Indeed, *al-Širāt al-mustaqīm* is the middle way between *ghulūw* and *jafā'* or between *ifrāt* and *tafrīt*. In this section, three aspects (1) *ghulūw* and *ifrāt*, (2) *jafā'* and *tafrīt* and (3) *al-Širāt al-mustaqīm* are explained based on the Scripture, Prophetic Literature and the views of selected Muslim scholars.

##### 4.1 Committing Excess and Exceeding the Bound (*Ghulūw* and *Ifrāt*)

Scholars of Arabic language and linguistics define the Arabic term *ghulūw* as transgressing the limits. It also refers to exceeding the limit. The Arabic phrase *ghalā fi al-dīn* means committing excesses in religion (Ibn Manzūr, 1399AH, Vol. 15, p. 122). The statement that the Scripture mentions (*lā taḡhlūw fī dīnikum*) means 'commit no excesses in your religion.' The term *ghulūw* that refers to committing excess is also found in the Prophetic literature. The Prophetic Tradition that states *Iyyākum wa al-ghulūw fī al-dīn* signifies harshness or severity or forcefulness or vehemence or take a turn for the worse in religion and exceeding the proper bound or extremism. From this, one may deduce that the Tradition admonishes people from becoming extremists in religious matters. Al-Ṭabarī states that the above phrase means "do not surpass the truth in your religion and abuse it." The origin of *ghulūw* in everything is exceeding the bound which has a boundary (Al-Ṭabarī, 1373AH, Vol. 6, p. 43). It can be said in relation to religion that a person has exceeded the limit or become an extremist in understanding the meaning and its application. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah mentions that *ghulūw* refers to transgressing the limits. It eliminates every distortion or excess and complacency in human thinking (Quṭb, n. d., Vol. 3, p. 337).

Ibn Kathīr states that God prohibited the People of the Scripture from new developments in religion or unforeseen events in it; they exceeded the limits regarding Prophet 'Īsā to the extent that they elevated him above the status given to him by God. From the status of being a Prophet, they raised him to a state of a deity; they worshipped him like they worshiped God and committed excesses in obeying him. They began to accept everything that had been attributed to him, regardless of truth or false, right or wrong, good or bad, and that is what God says that Christians took rabbis and priests as their lords (Ibn Kathīr, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 589). Ibn Taymiyyah asserts that Christians had committed too many excesses in their doctrines and actions from all perspectives and angles by distorting their Holy Book and thence God has warned and prohibited them from extremism on the Qur'ān (Ibn Taymiyyah, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 289).

According to Muslim scholars, extremism is divided into three categories. First is compelling the self or others with what has not been made obligatory by God-the Law Giver. This is, in particular, in relation to the acts of devotion. This is substantiated by the Prophetic Tradition: "Narrated Anas ibn Mālik: Once the Prophet entered the Mosque and saw a rope hanging in between its two pillars. He said, "What is this rope?" The people said, "This rope is for Zainab who, when she feels tired, holds it (to keep standing for the prayer)". The Prophet said, don't use it. Remove the rope. You should pray as long as you feel active and when you get tired, sit down" (Al-Bukhārī, 1986, Vol. 2, p. 132).

Commenting on this Prophetic Tradition, al-Askalānī says that there is sincere concern to adopt a 'middle course' in the acts of worship and prohibit deep penetration or concentration in it (Al-Askalānī, 1380AH, Vol. 2, p. 29). This conveys that prayer should be performed according to normalcy and natural strength of a person and

one should not exert pressure to continue praying with hardship or pain and upon tiredness one should sit down and continue prayer. In fact, the religion has simplified the requirements to the extent that people find no difficulties to perform their obligations. Second is prohibiting the righteous things that God has permitted, whether it is in relation to acts of devotion or abandoning the lawful. This is evident in the following Prophetic Tradition: “Anas reported that some of the Companions of God’s Apostle asked his (the Prophet’s) wives about the acts that he performed in private. Someone among them (among his companions) said: I will not marry women; someone among them said: I will not eat meat; and someone among them said: I will not lie down in bed. He (the Holy Prophet) praised God and glorified Him, and said: What has happened to these people that they say so and so, whereas I observe prayer and sleep too; I observe fast and suspend observing them; I marry women also. And he who turns away from my Patterns, he has no relation with me” (Muslim, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 703).

The Tradition conveys that when a Muslim compels himself to carry on an unlawful thing, such as eating a forbidden animal or dead meat it will lead him to a sin. It is definitely affliction and severity. This is because God has prohibited these things under normal circumstances and permitted them in case of emergencies. This is clearly stated in the Scripture. This implies that using force to avoid permissible things is not only discouraged but the Prophet has declared that such a person has no relation with him. It also impresses the believers, i.e. Muslims, not to suspend activities that are permissible and lawful and if they do such things they are regarded as deviating from the method of moderation. Third is related to enforcing a legal ruling on others by adopting a position of a fanatic eulogist or becoming rude or reprehensible and eulogizing others with what Islamic Law has not approved, such as sinfulness or moral depravity or deviation from religion. Both circumstances are regarded as extremism.

From a perspective, extremism is viewed as a deviation from following Islamic legal rulings and God’s commandments. It refers to crossing its scope or range or limit or bound which God has ordained. It also refers to an exaggeration in the observance of religion and truly not a deviation from it. In another perspective, extremism is not only in action but also in omission. Abandoning lawful things like sleeping, eating and other permissible acts is also one kind of extremism, even if omission is for the sake of involving too much in the path of devotion and nearness to God, as some popular Muslim mystics or spiritualists do (Al-Luwayḥaqī, 1992, p. 84).

Extremism can occur either in beliefs or practices. Extremism in belief is of two kinds: ‘complete extremism in belief’ and ‘extremism in belief only.’ ‘Complete extremism in belief’ is committed in the entire Islamic legal and key creedal issues. As for ‘extremism in belief only,’ it is committed in relation to creed, such as excess committed by leaders or excess related to innocence of the community or charging individuals as infidels and their seclusion from the rest of the society.

The Scripture also uses the term *ifrāt* that refers to exceeding the bound. The Prophet’s wife Umm Salamah is reported as communicating to ‘Ā’ishah, another wife of the Prophet that “the Prophet prohibited you from immoderation.” In another narration, it has been said that “the Prophet prohibited from immoderation in religion, implying advancement, antecedence and exceeding the bound.” The term appears in the Scripture. In discussing this term in the verse of the Scripture, al-Ṭabarī says that the term *ifrāt* refers to extravagance, immoderateness (*isrāf*) and exceeding the proper bound (*ishtāf*). From the above articulation, it is explicit that *ifrāt* means exceeding the bound and driving away from the required measure, which is the opposite of *tafrīt*.

In articulating the issue of transgressing the limit, Maududi writes that “it has very extensive meanings. One goes beyond the limit if he makes lawful things unlawful or abstains from things which God has declared to be pure as if they are impure or if one is extravagant in the use of pure things or if one makes use of unlawful things as if they are lawful. God does not like such acts of transgression” (Maududi, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 67). In articulating further on the issue, Maududi refers to a Prophetic Tradition that when the Prophet came to know that a Companion had been abstaining from having conjugal relations with his wife for a long time and had been devoting the whole of his time to worship, he immediately ordered him to go to his wife. When the Companion replied that he was observing fasting, the Prophet told him to break his fasting and go to his wife. All these explanations, based on the text of the Qur’ān and the Tradition, indicate that Islam advocates moderation, i.e. fairness, justice, goodness in everything. Undoubtedly, there is no room for immoderation or extremism. Even in relation to acts of devotion, it is not permissible to be immoderate at the expense of others’ rights.

#### 4.2 Negligence and Harshness (*Tafrīt*) and (*Jafā’*)

The Scripture uses the term *tafrīt* which is defined as negligence (Ibn Manẓūr, 1399AH, Vol. 7, p. 269). According to a Prophetic Tradition, an ignorant person is not seen except as excessive or prodigal or spendthrift.

It is lessening prodigality in man's action and intensifying neglectfulness, exaggeration or immoderation in anything. The Scripture contains some verses in which the concept of negligence is absolutely rejected. Ibn ʿAbbās, Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, Mujāhid and exegetes al-Ṭabarī, al-Jawharī, Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Qāsimī all hold the similar view that the term *tafrīṭ* refers to leaving, scorning, neglecting, disdain, limiting, shortening, confining, omitting and forfeiting.

Another term used in the Scripture is *jafāʾ* which means, harshness, roughness, sternness, antipathy, aversion, estrangement and alienation. In explaining the terms *tafrīṭ* and *jafāʾ* some illustrations are provided by Muslim scholars. They are (1) disobedience to parents, (2) postponing today's work to tomorrow without valid reason, (3) disregarding training for children, (4) delaying prayers from designated time, (5) rudeness or impoliteness in human relations, (6) depriving rights of religious scholars and weakness in relationship with them and (7) disconnecting relationship with kith and kin. What is noteworthy is that both negligence and harshness are contrary to the method of moderation.

#### 4.3 Straight Path (*Al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*)

It is true that without understanding the meaning of the Arabic term *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* employed in the Scripture and underlining its scope, it is not possible to comprehend the true objective of moderation in religion. This term is mentioned in tens of places in the Scripture. The opening chapter of the Scripture (*al-Fātiḥah*) contains a verse that begins with 'Guide us the straight path'. This verse is followed by another verse in which the term 'path' is used indicating that the Muslim community is the one that does not deviate from the truth, rather blessed by God.

In addition, the term 'path' also appears in other places in the Scripture. In interpreting the term *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, al-Ṭabarī refers to the opening chapter *al-Fātiḥah*: 5 of the Scripture and explains that the Muslim community has reached the consensus that it refers to clear or straight path in which there is no crookedness for people to follow to obtain felicity (Al-Ṭabarī, 1373AH, Vol. 1, p. 73). This interpretation has also been advocated by other exegetes. Ibn ʿAbbās-the companion of the Prophet of Islam is reported as saying that "Jibrīl said to Muḥammad, the Prophet: *Ihdinā al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, saying that the guiding path has been inspired and it is the religion of God in which there are no deficiencies, discrepancies or disturbances" (Al-Ṭabarī, 1373AH, Vol. 1, p. 74). *Al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* is also illustrated as enforcing every commanded action with punctuality without procrastination and abandoning forbidden things (Al-Qāsimī, 1957, Vol. 1, pp. 20-22). The 'straight path' mentioned in this chapter is also referred to as 'moderate path' according to some Muslim scholars.

### 5. Features of Moderation in the Scripture

The Scripture conveys that moderation has many features that are distinguished from one another. They lead people to understand the characteristic of comprehensiveness of Islam as the method of moderation that should be applied in all walks of life. As the message of religion of Islam is moderation, the Muslim community that follows the religion is also moderate. In analyzing the Muslim discourses on moderation and browsing through the Scripture and its wide exegetical literature, one can underscore significant, fundamental and extraordinary features so that the method of moderation is not misunderstood. The Qur'ān-the Scripture declares that this Muslim community is unique in the sense that it is distinguished among other nations and communities. God exalted this community with landmarks, honoring, ennobling and dignifying it. According to Muslim scholars, among the foremost significant features of moderation are: (1) Excellence or Goodness, (2) Justice, (3) Ease and Removal of Hardship, (4) Wisdom, (5) Straightness and (6) Between Two Limits (Muḥammad, 1996, p. 58). Each feature manifests an objective and offers a pragmatic message. According to Muslims, God is the only Guide to the right path. All the above features serve as instruments to confine people to moderation and its true understanding, not extremism.

#### 5.1 Excellence or Goodness

The first feature of moderation is excellence or goodness. This inference is substantiated by a verse in which God mentions in the Scripture that Muslims are the 'Middle Nation' (in Arabic, *Ummatan wasaṭan*). Thus, Muslims are described as the best community (in Arabic, *Khayra Ummah*) in the Scripture. It is explicit from the verses of the Scripture that one of the meanings or propositions of moderation is excellence or goodness (in Arabic, *khayriyyah*). In this context, Ibn Kathīr propounds that 'middle' refers to the 'best' and 'excellent' (Ibn Kathīr, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 190). In his explanation, he further argues that the Arabic term *Khayra Ummah* implies the best of people for mankind; the best for and among nations; and the beneficial for mankind. Al-Ṭabarī claims that elucidation of verse 110 of *Āl ʿImrān* is that this Muslim community is among the best of nations that had gone before. Furthermore, he propounds that the 'middle' stated in the Scripture refers to 'justice' and its meaning is 'the best' because the best people among the nations are those who maintain justice (Al-Ṭabarī,

1373AH, Vol. 2, p. 7).

It is explicit from the illustration that ‘excellence or best or goodness’ is interpreted as moderation which God mentions among the features and characteristics of this Muslim community. The relation between ‘excellence or best or goodness’ and ‘moderation,’ according to al-Ṭabarī, are “that you are the best of peoples that you propagate good and forbid evil and believe in God” (Al-Ṭabarī, 1373AH, Vol. 4, p. 44). It refers to the belief in relation to everything that is liked and believed, inclusive of messengers, scriptures, accountability and reward (Al-Qāsimī, 1957, Vol. 4, p. 936). Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā highlights that this Muslim community is not regarded as the best among mankind unless it upholds the mission of propagating good and forbidding evil. In interpreting verse *Āl Imrān*: 110 of the Scripture, al-Tirmidhī, a compiler of Prophetic Traditions, remarks that the Prophet said that Muslims are one among seventy nations; they are the best of them and the most honorable of them in the sight of God. This statement implicitly implies that Muslims are required to be moderate in all circumstances and situations and not otherwise; if they are immoderate then they are not recognized as the best in the sight of God.

The preceding discourse explains that the phenomenon of excellence or best or goodness of the Muslim community that God has made is the community of justice. The exegetes integrate meanings of excellence or the best or goodness and moderation to the extent that one becomes complementary to another in terms of explanation. The most remarkable aspects of excellence or best or goodness are (1) belief in God, (2) commitment to execute the mission of propagating good and forbidding evil, (3) its recognition as a nation for mankind to provide benefits, (4) the majority of the people respond to the call of the Prophet, (5) not to act on the basis of injustices, (6) the Scripture revealed to the Muslim community is among the heavenly books, (7) the Prophet of the Muslim community is regarded as the role model for Muslims (8) its advancement over other nations on the day of Resurrection and Judgment and its entering Paradise and (9) its adherents will be the majority in Paradise (Muḥammad, 1996, pp. 60-62).

### 5.2 Justice

The second feature of moderation is justice (in Arabic *‘adl*). This term refers to straightness, straightforwardness, impartiality, fairness, equitableness, probity, honesty, uprightness, equitable composition or just composition (Cowan, 1980, p. 590). Al-Qurṭubī remarks that ‘middle’ refers to ‘justice’ and commendable of all things is its ‘equitableness.’ He adds that the Muslim community will not witness except justice and will not enforce words of others on others, except that they are just (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964, Vol. 2, p. 155). The Scripture refers to justice (in verses *al-Nisā’*: 58 and *al-Mā’idah*: 8). Commenting on verse *al-Mā’idah*: 8 of the Scripture, al-Ṭabarī argues that it means to believe in God and His Messenger so that moralities and good characters are executed for God as a witness with justice. In friendship and enmity there are no deviations from legal rulings. In deeds, there are no diversions from what God has prescribed. There is neither reduction nor addition in implementing legal rulings.

Ibn Kathīr interprets that it (middle) refers to upholding the truth for the sake of God and not for the sake of the people and be witnesses to fair dealings which means with justice (Ibn Kathīr, n. d., Vol. 2, p. 58). None should abandon justice for it is obligatory on every individual in all places, circumstances and time (Ibn Kathīr, n. d., Vol. 2, p. 58). The above conveys that when someone is just, in fact, he is straightforward, impartial, fair, equitable, honest and upright in everything. One who observes moderation, according to the Scripture, is expected to have all these attributes. In other words, when one advocates moderation, he should take into account these aspects comprehensively.

Commenting on verse *al-Nisā’*: 58 of the Scripture, Maududi says that God cautions Muslims to avoid evils and not to entrust the positions of trust to incompetent people. He further opines that the verse implicitly reflects not to entrust positions of responsibility and religious and political leadership to inefficient, incompetent, narrow-minded, immoral, dishonest and unjust people (Maududi, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 132). Muslims are enjoined to entrust positions of responsibility to only qualified and competent people of good moral character (Maududi, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 132).

Justice is a fundamental right of every one; no one is deprived of getting it. Justice is the right of every individual; there is no justice among Muslims only but there must be justice with People of the Scripture too. Regardless of people’s affiliation to other faiths or belief systems or religions, justice must be administered. This is a cosmic method or procedure. This quality must be manifested in all human relations. It is the right of people whether they are believers, unbelievers, friends, foes, blacks, whites, Arabs, or non-Arabs. The Muslim community should be the frontline force in enforcing justice among people.

Administration of justice is obligatory on this Muslim community even if there is hostility or coercion to be sympathetic to persons of abominable character and conduct. Muslims must be just, for it is nearer to piety and



godliness. Administration of justice is obligatory even if there is pressure. It must be carried out even if it involves kith and kin. The Muslim community is commanded to establish and administer justice and be witnesses to God and not anyone else. Maududi comments that “you have not only to do justice but have to also bear the standard of justice in order to eradicate injustice and establish right and justice in its place. As believers, you have to gird up your loins to support justice, whenever your support is needed” (Maududi, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 175). Not only the term ‘justice’ appears in Prophetic Traditions but there is strong emphasis to administer it. To quote a Muslim Prophetic Tradition: “Al-Bukhārī recorded a tradition on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī. Allah’s Apostle said, “Noah will be called on the day of resurrection and he will say, Labbaik and Sa’daik, o my lord, Allah will say, “did you convey the Message? Noah will say, yes. His nation will then be asked, “Did he convey the Message to you? They will say, “No Warner came to us.” Then Allah will say (to Noah), ‘who will bear witness in your favor’ He will say, “Muhammad and his followers. So they (i.e. Muslims) will testify that he conveyed the Message. And the Apostle (Muhammad) will be a witness over yourselves, and that is what is meant by the statement of Allah “Thus We have made of you a just and the best nation that you may be witnesses over mankind and the Apostle (Muhammad) will be a witness over yourselves” (Al-Bukhārī, 1986, Vol. 6, p. 15).

It is said that the term ‘middle’ that appears in the Scripture also means ‘just.’ Al-Ṭabarī narrates that the Arabic term *Ummatan wasātan* refers to the community of justice. Al-Qurṭubī also holds the opinion that ‘middle’ means ‘just.’ There are several other Traditions explaining the need for upholding justice which is nothing but one of the manifestations of applying the method of moderation in human relations at all levels according to Islamic Traditions.

### 5.3 Ease and Removal of Hardship

The third feature of moderation is ease and removal of hardship. The foremost thing that penetrates our mind while discussing moderation is the true meaning and application of ease or facilitation and removal of hardship. This inference is relevant because among the most significant features of moderation are ease and removal of hardship in all aspects of life. The preceding discourse asserts that Islam is a religion of moderation and there is neither excessiveness nor harshness in it, not even immoderation and negligence (Muḥammad, 1996, p. 117). Ease and removal of hardship are the highest goal between immoderation and negligence, between severity and obstinacy, and between carelessness and omission.

The Scripture uses the Arabic term *yusr* which according to Ibn Manẓūr refers to ease, relief, tenderness, flexibility, compliance and submission. The term *yusr* is the opposite of the Arabic term *‘usr* (difficulty, hardship). Technically, the term *yusr* refers to an action that a person does without any restriction or oppression or difficulty or hardship (Al-Zamakhsharī, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 408). It is explicit from the Scripture that God does not place burden on any soul except what it can bear in terms of capability and facilitation, without distancing the goal of ability (Al-Zamakhsharī, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 408). Man has the ability to pray more than five times a day, fast more than a month and perform pilgrimage more than once in life (Al-Zamakhsharī, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 408). But God prescribes neither maximum nor minimum but the average or something which is possible by everyone, whether it is in acts of devotion or other worldly matters. Al-Qāsimī mentions that the term *yusr* refers to an action that a soul is able to do without any fatigue or exhaustion and without causing heaviness to one’s body (Al-Qāsimī, 1957, Vol. 2, p. 427). Ṣāliḥ ibn Maḥmūd says that it refers to what man does without being afflicted by hardship and additional burden or trouble and without sacrificing what he possesses in terms of ability and effort and without pain (al-Bāḥisīn, 2001, p. 46).

The Scripture uses the term *Ḥaraj* which literally means narrowness, tightness, closeness, restriction, limitation and dejectedness. Technically, it refers to every action that places additional burden or hardship or disturbs body or soul or wealth at once or affects one financially (al-Bāḥisīn, 2001, p. 47). On his commentary (to verse *al-Ḥajj*: 78 of the Scripture), Ibn ‘Abbās establishes that God has made Islam flexible and easy (Al-Ṭabarī, 1373AH, Vol. 17, p. 206). Al-Daḥḥāk holds the opinion that God has made Islam flexible and does not impose any hardship (Al-‘Askalānī, 1325AH, Vol. 4, p. 453). Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān argues that God does not restrict the religion but makes it open for those who wish to embrace it. God does not declare anything obligatory except when He makes something required; He provides concession (under special circumstances).

In articulating the meaning of verse *al-Ḥajj*: 78 of the Scripture, Maududi argues that Islamic creed is very simple and straightforward and Islamic laws are practicable; man is free within the bounds to make as much progress as he can (Maududi, 1983, Vol. 7, p. 227). This, according to him, impresses upon people that their lives are free from all useless and unnatural restrictions which are imposed upon communities by unauthorized people and priests (Maududi, 1983, Vol. 7, p. 227).

Numerous verses are found in the Scripture that explain that Islam is a religion of flexibility and ease or relief.

God has removed hardship from this Muslim community and does not cause harm or place on man any burden except what he can bear. This fact is elucidated in verses *al-Baqarah*: 185, *al-Nisā'*: 28, *al-A'ālā'*: 8, *al-Inshirāh*: 5-6 and *al-Ṭalāq*: 4-5 of the Scripture. There are also verses in which facilitation is provided in observing religious requirements and obligations. In this regard, al-Sha<sup>c</sup>bī remarks that when there are differences of opinion between two things, the easiest and the nearest of the two is the right thing and should be upheld (Al-Qāsimī, 1957, Vol. 3, p. 427). Several exegetes interpret that the above verses explicitly indicate that God wishes for this community, ease and flexibility and not hardship, suffering or pain (Ibn Kathīr, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 217).

Regarding this matter, Sayyid Qutb mentions that “strictness in the application of the rules relating to acts of worship and the tendency to restrict unqualified exemptions can be counterproductive. Besides causing hardship and discomfort, they have little effect in dissuading those who want to evade the rules” (Qutb, n. d., Vol. 1, p. 201). Referring to verse *al-Nisā'*: 28 of the Scripture, Qutb articulates that “God neither charges His servants with an unreasonable suppression. God’s wish to make things easy for man appears very clearly in the constitution He has laid down for human life which takes into consideration man’s nature, ability and real needs. It taps all of man’s constructive energy, protecting it against wasteful use” (Qutb, n. d., Vol. 3, p. 89). In addition to the emphasis of the Scripture on the significance of the concept of ease, the Prophetic literature also contains Traditions and the Prophet had warned Muslims not to be extremists. One such example is: “Narrated Abū Hurairah: The Prophet said, Religion is very 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 things that you will be rewarded and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, afternoons and during the last hours of the nights” (Al-Bukhārī, 1986, Vol. 1, p. 34).

The Prophet is reported to have adopted ease or flexibility as a method in his life. An example of such a practice is highlighted in a Tradition which states: “Narrated ‘Ā’ishah: Whenever the Prophet was given an option between two things, he used to select the easier of the two as long as it was not sinful; but if it was sinful, he would remain far from it” (Al-Bukhārī, 1986, Vol. 8, p. 511).

The Prophet advised his ambassadors and propagandists to adopt facilitation in their dealings and approaches. He emphasized on them to treat people in the most agreeable way. To quote a Tradition from him: “Narrated Abū Mūsā that when God’s Apostle sent him and Mu<sup>c</sup>ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen, he said to them, Facilitate things for the people (treat the people in the most agreeable way) and do not make things difficult for them and give them glad tidings and let them not have aversion, (i.e., to make the people hate good deeds) and you should both work in co-operation and mutual understanding, obey each other” (Al-Bukhārī, 1986, Vol. 8, p. 92).

The Scripture uses the term *raf<sup>c</sup> al-ḥaraj* (removal of hardship) in verses *al-Hajj*: 78, *al-Mā'idah*: 6, *al-Tawbah*: 91, *al-Aḥzāb*: 38 and *al-Nūr*: 61. These verses are evidence to the phenomenon that God has removed hardship from the Muslim community and does not impose it on man in enforcing legal rulings. The religion of Islam, with all its duties, worship and laws, always considers man’s nature and abilities. It aims to satisfy human nature and acknowledges man’s abilities so that he can use them constructively and positively. Human nature is neither suppressed nor left uncontrolled. Whenever legal rulings are prescribed that appear to be hard or rigid or difficult to perform, justifications are provided as a means of convincing. Ease and removal of hardship in legal rulings and obligatory acts are too obvious. Any matter or ruling or commandment that seems to impose hardship has proper justification. Overall, no imposition against human ability or nature is found in Islamic injunctions.

#### 5.4 Wisdom

The fourth feature of moderation is wisdom. Many Muslim scholars assert that wisdom is one of the significant features of moderation. The Arabic term *ḥikmah*, used in the Scripture, literally means wisdom, justice, knowledge, reasoning, gentleness, prophethood and the Scripture of God. The term is an expression that calls for knowing excellence of things with the best of knowledge. Wisdom, thus, refers to the process of obtaining the truth through knowledge and reasoning. It refers to prohibiting its owner from ignorance. It also refers to forbidding people from moving towards harshness and evil.

Muslims believe that the Prophet was sent to prohibit people from worshipping other than God and committing immoralities. The Qur’ān, the Bible and other heavenly Books contain messages prohibiting people from committing polytheism. Technically, according to some exegetes, the term *ḥikmah* refers to prophethood and the Qur’ān-the Scripture and its knowledge. It refers to the process of uttering words and performing deeds in conformity with God’s teachings and stipulations. It also refers to the Patterns of the Prophet. It is also obtaining true knowledge and action by it. None is recognized wise, except when he combines knowledge and action, puts everything in its place and provides prompt response with a clear goal.

Knowledge is wisdom because it prohibits a human from stupidity, foolishness and idiotic behaviors, and educates him to refrain from impudence which is the source of unhealthy culture and destructive actions. Upon studying wisdom, one finds comprehensive definition combining all these sayings in defining the term and that is its goal in saying and doing and putting everything in its proper place. These sayings enter into this definition and separate the decree which has the meaning of separating truth from falsehood.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa‘dī argues that wisdom refers to knowledge and useful sciences, visionary intellects and kind hearts and maintaining objectivities in words and deeds (Al-Sa‘dī, 2002, Vol. 1, p. 332). He remarks that things are not to be regarded authentic except by wisdom which refers to putting things in their appropriate places and keeping matters in accordance with their respective positions (Al-Sa‘dī, 2002, Vol. 1, p. 332). Ibn al-Qayyim upholds that doing good deeds according to what has been commanded is wisdom. It refers to knowing the truth and action by it and ultimately proceeding forward with a proper goal in words and deeds. This is not possible except with genuine understanding of the Scripture and Islamic jurisprudence and realization of faith. He says in another context that wisdom refers to an action that is desirable and suitable at a time which is appropriate. He also asserts that wisdom means to give everything its right, not to violate its limit, not to act earlier than the appointed time and not to delay or postpone its accomplishment.

This discourse in relation to wisdom unveils that it is necessary for it to follow the bounds which implies moderation. It requires strict observance of moderation and not affected by excessiveness or negligence; this is the essence of wisdom. This implicates that abandoning moderation has its impact on passivism or negativism sooner or later. This goes against the spirit of wisdom and its advantages. The Scripture declares that God grants wisdom to which He wills and whosoever is granted wisdom gets overflowing benefits; hence man of understanding truly grasps the message.

### 5.5 Straightness

The fifth feature of moderation is straightness which many scholars endorsed. It has been deliberated that when someone is not in the network of straightness he will deviate from the truth according to the common understanding of the teachings of Islam. Deviation is a manifestation of either excessiveness or negligence and it is contrary to the spirit of moderation. There are arguments that moderation refers to balance, even if it is a little from the reality of commandments and prohibitions.

As this study focuses on various features of moderation, it is appropriate to explain the meaning of straightness and its scope to unravel its relation to moderation. Many verses are found on straightness in the Scripture. Verses *Hūd*: 112, *Shūrā*: 16, *Fuṣṣilat*: 30, *al-Jinn*: 16 and *Fuṣṣilat*: 6 of the Scripture explain the position of straightness and its significance in the worldview of Islam. Maududi interprets that “straightness refers not to make any change nor affect any increase or decrease in this religion only to please people” (Maududi, 1984, Vol. 12, pp. 135-136). He also articulates that “do not resort to any compromise with the misguided people on the principle of ‘give and take’: Do not make any room in the Religion for their whims, prejudices and practices of ignorance in the hope that they would embrace Islam... the Religion of God cannot be changed for the sake of the people” (Maududi, 1984, Vol. 12, pp. 135-136). One of the most significant understandings of straightness is strict observance of the straight path. This implies that the path of God and His laws are followed strictly and sincerely without any reservation or refutation, addition or deletion or exaggeration or elimination. This is the essence of moderation.

The Scripture uses the term *istiḳāmah* which literally means straightness, sincerity, uprightness, rectitude, integrity, probity, honesty, rightness, soundness and correctness (Cowan, 1980, p. 801). According to al-Raghīb, straightness refers to man’s strict observance of a religious requirement which is the straight path. Ibn al-Qayyim defines that straightness refers to following the straight path against tyranny or oppression or terrorization which transgresses the bounds in everything (Al-Jawziyyah, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 104). It also means to remain steadfast in pursuing what is entailed by the declaration of God and to discharge duties and responsibilities. Straightness is perpetuation in one particular direction without diverting to either right or left. Muslim scholars of Prophetic Traditions like Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Mājah recorded Traditions regarding people following the straight path.

‘Umar, the second Caliph of Islam, is reported as saying that straightness refers to maintaining the straight path in following God’s commandments and avoiding the prohibitions and not dealing in fraudulent manners like dodging of foxes (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 528). ‘Uthmān, the third Caliph, is reported as saying that straightness means performing a given action faithfully for the sake of God only (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 528). ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the fourth Caliph and Ibn ‘Abbās, the Prophet’s companion are reported as saying that straightness refers to maintaining straightness in fulfilling the religious duties or following the Divine precepts

sincerely (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 529). Al-Ḥasan, the Successor, is reported as saying that straightness refers to maintaining steadfastness in observing the commandments of God, regulating life based on His obedience and distancing from sins and insubordinations (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 529). Mujāhid, the Successor, also contributed to the meaning of the term straightness by almost subscribing to the same view.

In addition to the Companions and the Successors, Ibn Taymiyyah propounds that straightness refers to maintaining steadfastness in love for God and servitude to Him and not to turn away from it, either right or left (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 529). Ibn al-Qayyim argues that straightness should be regarded as comprehensive in relation to religion; they stand between the Hands of God upholding the truth and allegiance and straightness related to words, deeds, circumstances and intentions. Then, he continues that one of the greatest of noble deeds is applying straightness (in all matters) (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 529).

The meanings extracted and discussed regarding straightness are inter-related according to the intellectual deliberations of the exegetes of the Scripture. In particular, Ibn al-Qayyim's logical arguments are explicitly clear that straightness has strong link with the concept of moderation, implying that there is no straightness without moderation and vice-versa.

### 5.6 Between Two Limits

The sixth feature of moderation is to maintain equilibrium 'between two limits' (*bayniyyah*). According to scholars, maintaining balance between two limits is one of the characteristics of moderation. On this feature, only a little has been directly referred to in early Islamic discourses with specific reference to the term. 'Alī Muḥammad Muḥammad articulates that maintaining balance between two limits refers to placing a thing in between two things and establishes that moderation conforms to 'between two limits' (Muḥammad, 1996, p. 171). According to him, it is not trivial, rather profound, where the term 'between two limits' is interpreted as equivalent to balancing and is far away from extremism, laxity, immoderation and negligence (Muḥammad, 1996, p. 171). Thus, 'between two limits' is a praiseworthy phenomenon. Scholars reiterate that there is relationship between moderation and 'between two limits'.

Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā advances a theory that the 'middle' is 'just' and 'best'. Increasing a thing more than what is required in anything is immoderation and decreasing is negligence or laxity. Everything which is immoderation or excessiveness or negligence or laxity is evil and blameworthy. The best is the middle between two things or matters or limits, i.e. intermediate between two things (Rashīd Riḍā, n. d., Vol. 2, p. 4). Muḥammad Quṭb mentions that moderation is indeed balance and it is justice (Quṭb, 1993, Vol. 1, p. 28). In interpreting verse *al-Baqarah*: 143 of the Scripture, he propounds that moderation must take place or be maintained in all walks of a Muslim life (Quṭb, 1993, Vol. 1, p. 28). It is to maintain balance in everything that a man does whether it is zeal or vivacity (Quṭb, 1993, Vol. 1, p. 28). Then, he elucidates moderation as balancing between various things, including balancing between the claims of an individual and a group.

'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir al-Sa'dī propounds that God commands the 'middle course' in everything between excessiveness and laxity (Al-Sa'dī, 1999, p. 90). 'Umar al-Ashqar argues that one of the problematic things that lawmakers could not justify in solving extremism is in the field of legislation. It is because some laws appear to be extremity of the left and others to the right (Al-Ashqar, 1982, pp. 86-87). However, he asserts that the Islamic Law is based on moderation in every aspect (Al-Ashqar, 1982, pp. 86-87). Yusuf al-Qaradāwī explains moderation as referring to balancing which means intermediateness or proportionateness or evenness between two limits or points or ends or sides or extremes of the opposites where one of them is not secluded based on influence and the opposite dismissed, where one of the two sides is neither considered nor taken for granted more than what is its due right (Al-Qaradāwī, 1982, p. 127). His illustration leads us to conclude that moderation is something in between two opposite things or two extremes.

'Abd Allāh al-Muḥsin al-Turkī mentions that moderation refers to the 'middle.' Likewise, it is obvious that moderation is to maintain balance between the religion and the world, between revelation and reason, between the needs of body and the needs of soul, and between meta-physical knowledge and physical knowledge. Indeed, moderation came to be known with this meaning in Islamic Creed, Thought, laws, worship and propagation and others (Al-Turkī, 1997, pp. 13-14). This interpretation of al-Turkī instigates and stimulates Muslims to realize that moderation refers to 'between two limits' in all aspects of a Muslim life.

The discourse on 'between two limits' provides a vivid scenario that it is a basic duty of Muslim scholars to underline the scope of moderation and regard it as the crucial issue for Muslims. It is suggested that Muslims explain this feature, particularly in confining to the bounds and explaining the method of moderation. This is what 'between two limits' is. This is not merely taking sides but providing evidence on the basis of balance, straightness and justice. In fact, excellence or goodness is true moderation. This has been strongly advocated by

early Muslim as well as contemporary scholars.

## 6. Conclusion

The preceding discourse leads readers to reach the conclusion that the 'middle' that is mentioned in the Scripture refers to integrating the best, justice and excellence in everything. It also refers to the 'middle' in terms of time and space, inclusive of the best, the superior and what is in between two meritorious things. It further means what is in between good and bad, and right and wrong. The discourse conveys that moderation comprises excellence or goodness and 'between two limits;' it is impossible to realize it without underlining the meanings of extremism or laxity or negligence or immoderation and the straight path according to the Scripture. It leads to acknowledge that [1] everything that is excessive or exceeding the bound is deviation from moderation, [2] everything observed as negligence and harshness is contrary to moderation and [3] the straight path represents the climax of moderation which is the highest in grade.

It can be concluded that moderation contains key features. They are integrated with one another. The characteristic of being the moderate community lies in commanding the righteousness and forbidding the viciousness which are ramifications and manifestations of moderation. Compared to others, in Islam, moderation is clear and tangible. The feature of ease or facilitation and removal of hardship as reflected in the concept of Islamic moderation is applied comprehensively, and not partially as falsely conceptualized and operationalized. This feature of moderation is so crucial that it is not possible to realize it without understanding the significance of ease and removal of hardship in religious matters.

The study leads us to believe that one of the interpretations of wisdom is putting a thing in its appropriate place, which is one of the most significant characteristics of moderation. Indeed, straightness is another method that God has applied; it is the source and essence of moderation. 'Between Two Limits' is another key instrument in limiting the scope of moderation and it not only denotes time and space but is applied on the basis of balance, straightness, justice and goodness in all aspects of life. Indeed, this is moderation in the true sense and it is articulated and demonstrated by classical and contemporary Muslim scholars, thinkers, exegetes and intellectuals in their religious discourses while explaining God's message and Prophetic teachings.

One can reach the conclusion that Islam is the religion of moderation. This is substantiated by the Scripture and Patterns of the Prophet. Therefore in understanding the religion and its teachings, none should rely on material other than the Islamic fundamental sources interpreted by reliable and qualified Muslim scholars. No reference should be made to polemical writings of unauthorized and unqualified people nor are neither quotations nor interpretations from unreliable sources trusted. This includes biased academics and journalists who are hired to generate intellectual dissension in order to lead innocent people to distrust Muslims. Instead of relying on unauthorized sources and unauthentic websites and information channels as well as industries that have vested interests, people should have farsightedness, open mindedness and transparency in referring to the genuine sources of Islam to know the truth in order to contribute to world peace and human civilization.

Muslims should realize that Islam is falsely presented either by Muslim fanatics, individually or collectively or by others. On such occasions, there should be no emotional reaction to such erroneous propaganda rather sensible and rational response is extremely important to avoid conflicts; no reliance on the interpretations of Islam given by any extremist Muslim individual or group that calls for violence, terrorism, militancy and revolt or even holy war in the name of religion because Islam is peaceful and moderate and neither advocates nor calls for violence which is obvious from the intellectual discourse.

## References

- °Abdullah, Y. °A. (1989). *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Brentwood: Amana Corporation.
- Abū Dāwud. (1984). *Sunan Abū Dāwud* (1st ed.). (Ahmad Hasan, Trans.). Lahore: Sh Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 4 volumes.
- Al-Ashqar, °U. S. (1982). *Khaṣā'is al-sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah* (1st ed.). Kuwait: Maktabat al-Falāḥ.
- Al-°Askalānī, I. H. (1325AH). *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (1st ed.). Hyderabad: Dār al-Ma°rifah al-Nizāmiyyah.
- Al-°Askalānī, I. H. (1380 AH). *Fatḥ al-bārī Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (1st ed.). al-Qāhirah: Al-Maṭba°at al-Salafiyyah wa Maktabātuha.
- Al-Bāḥisīn, Y. °A. A. (2001). *Raf° al-ḥaraj fī al-sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah: Dirāsah uṣūliyyah ta'sīliyyah* (4th ed.). Maktabat al-Rushd.
- Al-Bukhārī. (1986). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (6th ed.). (Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Trans.). Lahore: Kazi Publications, 8 volumes.

- Al-Jawziyyah, I. A. (1983). *Madārij al-sālikīn* (1st ed.). Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-<sup>c</sup>Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Luwayḥaqī, <sup>c</sup>A. A. I. M. (1992). *al-Ghulūw fī al-Dīn fī ḥayāt al-Muslimīn al-mu<sup>c</sup>āshirah* (2nd ed.). Bayrūt: Mu<sup>c</sup>ssasat al-Risālah.
- Al-Qaradāwī, Y. (2001). *al-Khaṣā'ish al-<sup>c</sup>Āmmah li al-Islām* (1st ed.). Bayrūt: Mu<sup>c</sup>ssasat al-Risālah.
- Al-Qāsimī, M. J. A. (1957). *Maḥāsīn al-Ta'wīl* (1st ed.).
- Al-Qurṭubī, A. <sup>c</sup>A. A., Muḥammad, I. A., Bakr, I. F., & al-Ansarī, S. A. (1964). *al-Jāmi<sup>c</sup> li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (2nd ed.). al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah.
- Al-Sa<sup>c</sup>dī, <sup>c</sup>A., & al-Raḥmān, I. N. (2002). *Taysīr al-karīm al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām al-Mannān*. Riyādh: Dār al-Salām li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī<sup>c</sup>.
- Al-Sa<sup>c</sup>dī, <sup>c</sup>A., al-Raḥmān, I., Nāṣir, I., & Allāh, <sup>c</sup>A. (1999). *al-Qawā'id al-ḥisān li tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (1st ed.). Riyādh: Maktabat al-Rashād li Nashr wa al-Tawzī<sup>c</sup>.
- Al-Ṭabarī, A. J., & Muḥammad, I. J. (1373AH). *Jāmi<sup>c</sup> al-bayān 'an tafsīr Āy al-Qur'ān* (2nd ed.). al-Qāhirah: Sharikat wa Maktabāt wa Maṭb<sup>c</sup>at Muṣaṭafā albānī al-Ḥalabī.
- al-Turkī, <sup>c</sup>A. A. A. (1997). al-Ummah al-wasaṭ wa al-minḥāj al-Nabawī fī al-da<sup>c</sup>wah ilā Allāh. *Majallat al-<sup>c</sup>Arabiyyah*, (12), 13-14.
- Al-Zamaksharī, M. I. (n. d.). *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzil*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma<sup>c</sup>rifāh.
- Asad, M. (1984). *The Message of the Qur'an*. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus.
- Cowan, J. M. (Ed.). (1980). *Hens Wehr a Dictionary of Modern written Arabic*. London: Macdonald and Evans Ltd.
- Daryabadi, A. M. (1971). *Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary* (1st ed.). Lahore: The Taj Company Limited.
- Ibn Taymiyyah, A. I. <sup>c</sup>A., al-Ḥalīm, I. <sup>c</sup>A., al-Salām, N. I. <sup>c</sup>A., & al-Karīm, A. (n. d.). *Iqtidā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm*.
- Kathīr, I. (n. d.). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-<sup>c</sup>uzīm*. al-Qāhirah: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-<sup>c</sup>Arabiyyah 'Isā albānī al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakā'uh.
- Mājāh, I. (n. d.). *Sunan ibn Mājāh*.
- Manzūr, I. (1399 AH). *Lisān al-<sup>c</sup>Arab*. Bayrūt: Dār Bayrūt, Chapter al-ghayn, Section Ghalā'.
- Maududi, S. A. A. (1983). *The Meaning of the Qur'an* (7th ed.). Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, 12 volumes.
- Muḥammad, <sup>c</sup>A. M. (1996). *Malāmiḥ al-wasaṭiyyah fī al-Qur'ān*.
- Muslim. (1987). *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, Trans.). Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 4 volumes.
- Quṭb, M. (1993). *Manhaj al-tarbiyyat al-Islāmiyyah* (14th ed.). al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Shurūq.
- Quṭb, S. (n. d.). *In the Shade of the Qur'ān* (<sup>c</sup>Ādil Ṣalāḥī, Trans.). Leicester: The Islamic Foundation.
- Ridā, M. R. (n. d.). *Tafsīr al-manār* (2nd ed.). Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma<sup>c</sup>rifāh.

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).