

Why Muslims are a Moderate Nation

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Allah says in the Qur'an: "And thus we have made you a moderate nation that you will be witnesses over the nations (mankind) and the Messenger will be a witness over you" (al-Baqarah, 143).

The key words in this verse (*ayah*) are "*ummatan wasatan*" (a moderate nation), from which the concept of *wasatiyyah* (moderation) is derived.

The concept is a very comprehensive and, at the same time, complex one. It perhaps most fully portrays the meaning of Islam and the role of Muslims.

In addition, it is the most widely used and abused concept. True Muslims proudly use it because they understand it, while those bent on manipulating Islam and Muslims inane abuse it because they do not – or pretend not to - understand it.

To the latter, the idea of moderate Islam and Muslims signifies alliance with and support of the West, politically, culturally and ideologically. It also denotes religious permissiveness, which is the threshold of liberalism. The weaker Muslim a person is, the more moderate he becomes.

The actual meaning of *ummatan wasatan*

The actual meaning of *ummatan wasatan* is "the true, just and best nation".

The source of this meaning is the plain message of the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah*, followed by authorities in the Arabic language, exegesis or *tafsir* (commentary) of the Qur'an, and theology, instead of some politicians, journalists, or just wannabes.

In Arabic, *wasat* means "best and most excellent". It also means "centre" and "middle".

For instance, the tribe of Quraysh was said to be in *wasat* (in the middle) in relation to other tribes. That means it was the best tribe.

Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was said to be in *wasat* with respect to his people. That means he was the best and most excellent of all of them.

When Allah furthermore says that the 'Asr prayer is the best, He describes it as *wusta* (a variation of *wasat*), that is, the middle and best prayer (al-Baqarah, 238).

The best and most just person among "the owners of the garden" the Qur'an also calls *awsat* (al-Qalam, 28). *Awsat* is the superlative form of *wasat*.

The reasons for being a moderate nation

Muslims are a moderate (best, just and most exemplary) nation for several reasons.

First

All earlier nations failed in different ways to embrace *en masse*, meticulously practice and preserve the teachings of their prophets. Muslims are the solitary exception with regard to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the Qur'an.

Those nations' subsequent religious trajectories turned out to be incongruous aberrations, and their civilizational directions failed experiments.

Second

Muslims shun the extremities of previous nations with which they rejected their prophets and corrupted their legacies. Those extremities are ideological and practical.

Foremost were the excesses of the Jews and Christians. The former depreciated and denigrated their prophets to such an extent that they killed many of them, while the latter incorrectly venerated Jesus so much that they ended up regarding him as the Son of God.

Muslims are a moderate (middle and justly balanced) nation because they stick to the truth and its right path, without swerving into any of the potential extremities (immoderations).

Third

Since every earlier nation failed and then adopted a wrong path – especially the Jews and Christians as the numerous and extant People of the Book – Muslims are the only hope for humanity.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was the final messenger of God (the Seal of Prophets) and the Qur'an the final revelation of Allah to mankind. As such, Allah promised that He will be the guardian both of the Qur'an and the final prophet's legacy.

Such could be one of the imports of the Prophet (pbuh) being sent "as a mercy to the worlds" (al-Anbiya', 107).

There is no tradition of another prophet that is intact today, nor is there a revealed scripture that has not been tampered with and distorted beyond recognition.

Muslims are therefore expected to be the advocates of ceaseless dialogues, discussions, debates and interactions in ways that are best and most gracious. Those initiatives should target all people, but, for obvious reasons, especially Jews and Christians.

Allah says: "Say: 'O People of the Book (Jews and Christians), come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah.' But if they turn away, then say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims'" (Alu 'Imran, 64).

That is one of the reasons why the mentioned verse on moderation is given within the framework of a discourse concerning the Jews and Christians as the People of the Book who had given up the stipulations of their covenants with Allah.

Fourth

Moderation is at once a privilege and responsibility. It is a two-edged sword, so to speak.

Islam as the final revelation emerged in the midst of man-made darkness-es and ignorance-s. It was placed right at the heart (in the middle or centre, *wasat*) of mankind's ideological, cultural and civilizational spectacles as well as experiences.

The understanding is in material and spiritual terms. Accordingly, Islam emerged surrounded by diverse cultural and civilizational undercurrents. It emerged equitably balanced in what could be considered a geographical, historical and spiritual midpoint, quickly becoming its centre of gravity.

What is more, for "moderate nation" in the above verse, the indefinite, rather than definite, article is used. It is "a moderate nation" and not "the moderate nation".

This implies that being a moderate and middle nation is nothing unprecedented. The nation of every single prophet was given a chance to be in a way a moderate nation – or the moderate (just and best) nation of its own time and place – as well.

As they were squandering their chances, though, the nations were gradually moving away from the centre (*wasat*) until they all, in the end, came to be relegated to the periphery – and the virtual oblivion - of the spiritual sphere.

Islam and Muslims were thrust into the centre - just like everybody else before them – with the task of trying to pull everybody back to it, or at least to mark and keep clear the paths that lead from the periphery back to the centre.

The task is critical because Islam is the final and only viable alternative. It is the only existential hope similar to Nuh's (Noah's) Ark.

If Muslims rise to the task, they merely reinforce their status as the best (moderate) nation. They will then be qualified to testify on the Day of Judgment against the other nations which refused to be pulled back from the periphery to the centre.

But if they fail in their assigned mission, the Prophet (pbuh) will then testify against Muslims on the Day of Judgment. He duly performed his prophet-hood functions upon them, in turn entrusting them to carry the torch of the truth elsewhere - but they failed.

The let-down means betrayal of the heavenly trust. It is a double failure: one towards themselves and the other towards the rest of the people. Fulfilling the trust correspondingly connotes the ultimate success and a double reward.

It follows that the Day of Judgment for Muslims will be a day of testimonies, either for them by the Prophet (pbuh) and other nations, or against them also by the Prophet (pbuh) and other nations.

For one to be Muslim for himself only is not a perfect situation. He ought to share his bounties as much as feasible with such as are starved of them. He should be a beacon of light, along with life, to others.

Most people will not react favourably, but that is their problem, not his. People are free, should live freely and should make free choices. Only then will religion – and life – make sense.

Muslims must not force anybody to accept and practice Islam. That is utterly un-Islamic. However, they are bidden to do so themselves entirely and to make Islam known as such to the world. After that “whosoever wills, let him believe, and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve” (al-Kahf, 29).

Allah confirms: “There shall be no compulsion in (acceptance of) the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong” (al-Baqarah, 256).

Positively, Islam is against the hypocritical styles of tolerance, pluralism, integration and liberalism.

Fifth

The nature of Islam is such that Muslims cannot vacillate between it and something else. Nor can they vacillate inside it between commitment and laxity.

Islam is the complete way of life which must be followed perfectly in terms of obeying its rules and regulations, and wholeheartedly in terms of the quality of the performed deeds.

Allah reminds: “O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely (and perfectly) and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy” (al-Baqarah, 208).

True (and moderate) Muslims live Islam to the fullest. They strive in the cause of Allah, making lowest the word(s) of those who disbelieved and the Word of Allah the highest, without being afraid of anybody’s accusations and blames.

They know that the ideas of *jihad*, *da’wah*, *shari’ah*, education, politics and all the civilization-building processes are as much central to Islam as its most fundamental spiritual ceremonies. When certainly all of them are unified can the robust edifice of Islam and its culture, as well as civilization, be erected.

True Muslims do not care if someone accuses them of being, for example, fundamentalists, conservatives, traditionalists, and even extremists, in that they know all too well what is going on and who is saying what. They are concerned about what Almighty Allah, the Prophet (pbuh), angels and all the good people may think and say about them.

Exclusively this way, it goes without saying, Muslims can be perfect examples to and saviours of others. People easily recognize authentic quality, honesty, trustworthiness and integrity wherever they may be, appreciating them afterwards more than anything else.

On the other hand, people (non-Muslims) nowadays do not appreciate Islam as much as they should – much less embrace it - essentially because Muslims are poor exemplars to others, individually and collectively, institutionally and privately.

Muslims are struggling with themselves at all possible levels, how then can they have time, or energy, for others? They are bogged down with rather insignificant issues in connection with their sheer existence, how then can they have time, capacity or will, to take on the challenges of the whole world?

This by no means bodes well for Muslims’ fortune on the Day of Judgment (the Day of testimonies) when they will have to face the Prophet (pbuh) and the rest of nations. Somebody will have to answer for the predicament, and woe to the culpable ones.

Sixth

Muslims are a moderate nation also because their Islam is reasonable, coherent and practical. It accepts and treats life and man exactly as they are, enhancing potentials and alleviating limitations. It sees a possibility in everything.

It moreover strikes a delicate balance between the exigencies of matter and spirit, body and soul, and this world and the Hereafter.

Life is a harmony and unity. It is intrinsically good, beautiful and pure, and so is man with his inborn disposition to worship his Creator. No aspect of life is to be pursued at the expense of another.

This balanced (moderate) attitude peculiar exclusively to Islam issues directly from the concept of Allah's Oneness (*tawhid*). It is but a sign of Allah's will and care for man, His vicegerent on earth.

Finally, when all is said and done, the meaning of "best, just, most excellent, middle and rightly balanced nation" entailed in *ummatan wasatan* (moderate nation) is more or less like the meaning of "best nation" (*khayru ummah*) about which Allah says: "You are the best nation produced (as an example) for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient" (Alu 'Imran, 110).