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## **Concept of Moderation (Wasatiyyah) and Laxity**

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### **Abstract:**

The phrase Al-Wasatiyyah comes from the Arabic word wasat, which meaning "middle," "just," "moderate," and "balancing." The word is employed in a variety of contexts, with all of the word variants revolving around similar linguistic connotations. Wasatiyyah is frequently referred to as the correct approach to follow in all aspects of human life. The main techniques to rejecting extremism holistically are its simplicity and balance. As a result, the goal of this research is to better comprehend the reality of the idea of al wasatiyyah in today's world. This article will seek to analyze the meaning of wasatiyyah and laxity, first from a literal and technical perspective, and then from the perspective of Prophet Traditions, Finally, the relevance of accepting the traits of wasatiyyah as a remedy for rejecting and opposing all forms of extremism will be explored in this article.

### **Keyword:**

*Moderation, Wasatiyyah, Laxity, Jurists, Opinion, Extremism.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Wasatiyyah (وسطية) is one of the greatest methods for encouraging the middle path in all aspects of life mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān and Hadith.<sup>1</sup> Islām has always emphasized on the concept of moderation and tolerance in attitude, worship, action, interaction, thinking, dealing and daily activities. When it comes to combating extremism and moderation, balance is the only path as violence only leads to damage. The principle of

wasatiyyah is the most effective way to overcome fear in legal disputes. The phrase wasatiyyah is originated from the root word wasat which means balance of justice and moderation between excess and laxity.<sup>2</sup> Wasatiyyah (وساطية) is one of the most important principles of Sharī'ah. The comprehensive understanding of “wasatiyyah” and “laxity” is the most significant aspect in the current scenario.<sup>3</sup>

### **CONCEPT OF WASATIYYAH**

Wasatiyyah (وساطية) is a fundamental feature of the Islamic community that has been in practice from centuries.<sup>4</sup> It is essential to recognize the definition of the term wasatiyyah in order to fully understand the principle of moderation.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Literal Etymology**

Literally, wasatiyyah (وساطية) is an Arabic word derived from root word ‘wasat’ (وسط) which means ‘just’, ‘moderate’, ‘excellent’<sup>6</sup> and like ‘a position in the middle of equal length around it’. Awsat (أوسط) (another derivative term of wasat) is used to describe ‘the middle of everything’ in relation to wasat. According to Imam Ahmed Saad, wasat (وسط) is a synonym of virtue as it refers to ‘the middle between two evil characters or two bad extremes’. It is ‘the best balance between two extremes. Wasat represents justice, moderation and devotion to virtue.’<sup>7</sup> It acts as a good quality because it lacks extremes like generosity (which is somewhere between lavishness and griping) and bravery (which is somewhere between cowardice and blinded bravery).<sup>8</sup>

#### **Technical Etymology**

In technical term, wasatiyyah (وساطية) is the middle ground between two forbidden extremes; excessiveness (افراط) and laxity (تفريط).<sup>9</sup> Moderation is a just, ethical and balanced approach by taking a middle ground between the worst and the best. In this regard, moderation means pursuing excellence (ihsan) in all areas, which is mandated in Islām.<sup>10</sup> The principle

of wasatiyyah elucidated by Hamka has been categorized into three groups:

1. People who merely pursue their wants and frequently sacrifice their reputation in order to achieve their desired goals.
2. The second group suppresses their all desires and engage themselves in self-denial activities.
3. The third group exists between the first two groups by not following their wishes blindly and fulfills only legal desires.

Moderation entails striking a balance between two extremes of truth and lie. Wasatiyyah (وسطية) exactly refers to the balance situation between two extremes without rejecting any rulings of Maqasid al-Shari'ah.<sup>11</sup>

### **JURISTS' OPINION ON AL-WASATIYYAH**

According to Muslim Jurists, there is no definite definition of wasatiyyah<sup>12</sup> as it is derived from the phrase Ummatan Wasatan (أُمَّةٌ وَسْطًا). The phrase wasat has been interpreted in a number of ways by religious scholars.<sup>13</sup>

Kamal Hassan mentioned that, 'The foundation of Islamic moderation is the pursuit of justice and moral excellence as well as the prevention of excess and unfairness that may or may not entail unnecessary difficulty or burden for oneself or others.'<sup>14</sup> According to Rashīd Riḍā, 'Wasat (وسط) is justice and the ultimate solution because any deviations from what is anticipated are excessive and any lack of it is neglect. Excursiveness and carelessness are both incompatible with orthodoxy. As a result, it is bad and deserves to be blamed. The best solution is a compromise between different alternatives'.<sup>15</sup>

According to Muhammad Shauki, 'Wasatiyyah (وسطية) is a moderate method that is not excessive.' Islām gives importance to middle nature in all fundamental principles of faith, worship, and morals. This characteristic becomes the defining feature that sets Islām apart from other religions. In this regard, Islām has always advised his believers not to fall into extremism or carelessness.<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Bakir Yakub and Khadija Othman said that wasatiyyah (وسطية) includes balance, fairness, diligence and goodness in work performance (اتقان) as Allāh Almighty has decided

to make Muslims the chosen persons and witnesses in order to make earth as balanced. As a result, Islamic moderation is defined as the accomplishment of justice (fairness) and moral goodness (moral excellences) in the face of other hardships or difficulties.<sup>17</sup>

Ibn Taymiyyah has described the principle of wasatiyyah (وسطية) as a fundamental way for followers or Muslims to comprehend their faith. Muslims will not be able to fulfill the exact aims of the religion if they do not consider the concept of justly balanced and that will ultimately fail to preserve the Sharī'ah rules. Muslims are expected to maintain a balance among their worldly activities and their eternal concerns.<sup>18</sup>

According to Al-Zuhaili, wasatiyyah (وسطية) is an essential attribute of Muslim character that is in line with the objectivity of human creation. Wasatiyyah thus denotes a complete rejection of extremism or a strong condemnation of any sort of radicalism motivated by self-interest in the guise of religion.<sup>19</sup> Wasatiyyah is committed to an ethical attitude and a systematic approach to demonstrate the qualities of justice and balance in an organized and scientific manner. It is one of the most important characteristics of Muslim activity and community as it conducts their daily activities in a balanced manner in this world and the next without luxury or excess.<sup>20</sup>

## **CONCEPT OF LAXITY**

The absence of laxity results in the failure to achieve justice, which is one of the primary goals of the Islamic law. Laxity results in new interventions, which in turn led towards innovations.<sup>21</sup>

### **Literal Etymology**

The term tafrit (تفريط) is used to indicate neglect, carelessness and ignorance. The word 'laxity' refers to carelessness or lack of strictness. A Prophetic tradition states that ignorant people are perceived as extravagant, prodigal and spendthrift. According to Ibn Abbas and Saeed Ibn Jubayr, the phrase tafrit means to leave, scorn, forget, disdain, restrict, omit and forfeit.<sup>22</sup>

### **Technical Etymology**

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Technically, it entails failing to follow the basic principles, to perform the prescribed acts of worship and failing to adhere to the rules of Sharī'ah.<sup>23</sup> It is due to lack of understanding of the moral principles and wisdom underlying behind Islamic injunctions. Laxity relates to those who believe in Allāh and follow His instructions.<sup>24</sup>

The presence of extremism in attitudes contributes in the formation of disturbances in sanctity. At the same time, it results in failure to apply justice particularly in achieving the goals of the Law Giver. Within the boundaries of Sharī'ah, there is no room for extremism in attitudes or practices. Such element should be removed from the legal regulations or laws.<sup>25</sup>

### CONCEPT OF WASATIYYAH IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Human knowledge is shaped by different experiences. When people fail to comprehend past experiences accurately then they fall into a state of misperception that leads to incorrect conceptualization of previous experiences. The same can be said about the term wasatiyyah as an Islamic ideal value. It is clearly a multidisciplinary area due to the breadth of its meaning and functional applicability.<sup>26</sup> The Islamic community has been named as Ummatan Wasaṭa (أُمَّةٌ وَسْطًا) <sup>27</sup> or the justly balanced community that has a unique historical significance as a religious community. The arrival Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was a historical response to two previous societies' imbalanced and immoderate attitudes to religion. Both of which dangerously departed from the straight path due to their extreme approaches to religion.<sup>28</sup>

Al-Fatiḥah, the first chapter of the Holy Qur'ān eloquently demonstrates the notion of wasatiyyah. The most important ritual prayer for man is to make supplication to Allāh to keep him moderate between radicalism and rejection.<sup>29</sup> It is also named as Surah Al-Mustaqim that is between two extreme approaches adopted by two religions. A number of Qur'ānic scholars believe that the two groups stated above are Christianity and Judaism respectively. Allāh عزَّ وجلَّ says in the Holy Qur'ān:

﴿قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَا تَغْلُواْ فِى دِينِكُمْ غَيْرَ ٱلْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُواْ أَهْوَآءَ قَوْمٍ قَدْ ضَلُّواْ مِن قَبْلُ وَأَضَلُّواْ كَثِيرًا  
وَضَلُّواْ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ﴾

*‘Say: “O people of the Book! exceed not in your religion the bounds (of what is proper) trespassing beyond the truth nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by who misled many and strayed (themselves) from the even way’.*<sup>31</sup>

All forms of belief, worship, rituals and transactions are included in this warning. In this perspective, Al-Fatihah advised Muslims to stay on the straight path by avoiding the diverted approaches. A significant element of the Sharī‘ah is to seek the direction of the right path. Islām sends a distinct message of compassion to mankind in terms of advocating moderation, lenience, fairness and peaceful coexistence between individuals of various racial, socio-cultural and ethno-religious backgrounds.<sup>32</sup>

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF WASATIYYAH AND LAXITY**

The significant message of Islām is moderation. Islām does not accept extremism or intolerance in any form. Moderation is considered as the highest norm for human activities that provides peace, unity and satisfaction to the people.<sup>33</sup> Islām has offered a complete code of life that teaches how to maintain a balance between the physical universe and the metaphysical cosmos. It means that it provide guidelines not to be overly strict in any area of life while neglecting another. It teaches to maintain balance in daily-life activities and worldly affairs.<sup>34</sup>

In the present times, the concept of wasatiyyah is extremely important. Wasatiyyah (وسطية) should be catered as a significant Sharī‘ah goal based on its significance. It is noteworthy as the concept of justice and freedom, which has been recognized as basic element.<sup>35</sup> Moderation in religious teachings, regulations and human relationships indicates that it is a matter of flexibility, goodness and ease.<sup>36</sup>

### **THE PROPHET’S MISSION OF WASATIYYAH**

Maintaining a balanced and moderate attitude is an essential part of achieving the ethical value of fairness. Wasatiyyah (وسطية) becomes one of the most essential elements that include restoring order and balancing of human abilities. On the basis of this foundation, major goal is to bring justice to society.<sup>37</sup> The Holy Qur’ān says that:

﴿لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ﴾<sup>38</sup>  
*'We sent aforetime our apostles with Clear Signs and sent down with them The Book and the Balance (of Right and Wrong), that men May stand forth in justice'.<sup>39</sup>*

This verse gives the message of creating balance and moderation between extreme inclinations. The mission of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was to correct natural human attributes in the proper position and degree as he said, 'I was sent to perfect the greatest values'. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the exemplary embodiment as Allāh عزوجل confirms in the Holy Qur'ān:

﴿وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ﴾<sup>40</sup>  
*'And thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character'.<sup>41</sup>*

The life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is a magnificent pattern for humanity to follow in every way.<sup>42</sup> The Holy Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) life is a perfect measure of balance among his ummah. Hazrat Umar رضي الله عنه was a great leader with good moral character, Hazrat Uthman رضي الله عنه was known for his modesty and gentleness and Hazrat Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was a model of tolerance and strength. In this sense, the human qualities among the Companions had not been combined proportionately as they possessed great character. As a result, the quality of justice that may be found in Hazrat Umar's رضي الله عنه character that cannot be found in Hazrat Uthman, hence they differed in nature and personality.<sup>43</sup>

### THE EMPHASIS OF WASATIYYAH IN THE SHARĪ'AH

The concept of moderation must not be separated from Sharī'ah as it encourages Muslims to be moderate and balanced. The wasatiyyah is said to be a midpoint between two points or degrees. All of these concerns fall into one of three categories; first category deals with negligence towards benefit, second relates to excessiveness while the third approaches to moderate attitude.<sup>44</sup> Anyone who refuses to follow the principles of

Sharī'ah will ultimately lose the benefits that the Sharī'ah has to provide. Sharī'ah, in contrast to both extremes sets a middle line in between them.<sup>45</sup> In the Holy Qur'ān, Allāh عز وجل says:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يَسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا﴾<sup>46</sup>  
 'Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not  
 niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those  
 (extremes).'<sup>47</sup>

The following verse clearly states that wasatiyyah is a fundamental feature of the Sharī'ah. Without a thorough understanding of justice, the floodgates of laxity and extremism will spread by contaminating the practice of moderation. As a result, it is mandatory to maintain the purity and sanctity in accordance with the intention of the Law Giver.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, wasatiyyah helps to attain fundamental universal principle defended by the Sharī'ah with the goal of bringing welfare to humanity.

## CONCLUSION

According to various jurists', wasatiyyah (وسطية) has a variety of meanings and definitions. It emphasizes on the quality of fairness and maintaining moderation in all facets of human existence is a requirement of Sharī'ah. The principle of wasatiyyah is significant as the concept of justice and freedom. The concept of wasatiyyah has been used frequently in the Prophetic Traditions as it is recognized as a vital element of the Muslim community.

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