

The Middle Grounds of Islamic Civilisation:

The Qur'ānic Principle of Wasatīyyah

Mohammad Hashim Kamali¹

Abstract: Is there such a thing as 'moderate Islam', and if so, what form does it take? The events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent Global War on Terror have led scholars to debate this issue intensively. This article proposes that the principle of '*Wasatīyyah*' or moderation and balance may provide the key to a better understanding of Islam and inter-civilisational relations. Reference is made not only to canonical Islamic scriptures but also to the work of Islamic scholars and commentators throughout the ages.

Introductory Remarks

Wasatīyyah (or the principle of moderation and balance) is an important but somewhat neglected aspect of Islamic teachings that has wide-ranging ramifications in almost all areas concerning Islamic civilisation. 'Moderation' as defined here is a moral virtue relevant not only to personal conduct but also to the integrity and self-image of communities and nations. It is an aspect of the self-identity and worldview of the *ummah* that is also valued in all major religions and civilisations. Moderation is a virtue that helps to develop social harmony and equilibrium in human relations. Despite its obvious advantages, one frequently notes that it is neglected not only in the personal conduct of individuals but also in social relations, religious practices and international affairs.

The need for *wasatīyyah* has acquired renewed significance in the pluralist societies of our times, especially in light of the 'clash

1. Mohammad Hashim Kamali is Chairman and CEO of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies.

of civilisations' as a result of the events of 9/11. It has become the centre of attention with the unprecedented spread of extremism and violence by individuals and countries in many parts of the world. This has increased the urgency of the call for bridge-building by many world leaders, including former Iranian President Khatami's call for a dialogue of civilisations in the United Nations General Assembly in 1997, and a renewed attention by Muslim commentators to the universal principles and teachings of Islam. Whereas Khatami's proposal looked towards an engaged dialogue between the Islamic world and other civilisations, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's proposed *Islam Hadhari* (or Civilisational Islam), which he introduced to Malaysia in 2004, sought to stimulate the discourse on Islamic civilisation from within.

Together, the two proposals combine the external and internal dimensions of civilisational discourse and may, as such, be considered as complimenting and balancing each other out. I shall return to Abdullah Badawi's ideas toward the end of this essay, but first propose to review the basic evidence of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* on the principle of *wasatīyyah* (also *i'tidāl* and *tawāzun*), and in addition survey the views on the subject held by early and modern commentators. Allow me to begin with a brief definition of the concept, and then turn to a review of the qur'ānic passages relevant to the subject. This will be followed by a review of three sub-themes of *wasatīyyah* that feature under the headings, respectively, of bringing of ease and removal of hardship in all aspects of Islam both religious and temporal, the moderation in meting out penalties for crimes, and finally environmental balance. Three other themes that feature in the remaining part of the essay are: the identification of *wasatīyyah*, a round-up of modern opinions, a discussion of *Islam Hadhari*, and my conclusions that follow.

Definition and Review of Evidence

Moderation, or *wasatīyyah* (Arabic synonyms: *tawassut*, *i'tidāl*, *tawāzun*, *iqtiṣād*) is closely aligned with justice, and means opting for

a middle position between two extremes, often used interchangeably with ‘average’, ‘core’, ‘standard’, ‘heart’ and ‘non-aligned’. The opposite of *wasatīyyah* is *taṭarruf*, which denotes ‘inclination toward the peripheries’, ‘extremism’, ‘radicalism’ and ‘excess’. In its Arabic usage, *wasatīyyah* also means the best choice – such as in the *ḥadīth*: “The Prophet [p.b.u.h.] was the best of the Qurayshite descent – *kāna rasūl Allāhi awṣaṭu quraysh nasaban*”.² It is defined as “a recommended posture that occurs to the people of sound nature and intellect, distinguished by its aversion to both extremism and manifest neglect”.³ *Iqtisād*, which is synonymous with the Arabic word for the science of economics, thus signifies a moderation in spending that is averse to both extravagance and niggardliness.

According to Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, “in the common parlance of the people of our time, *wasatīyyah* means moderation and balance (*i’tidāl*) in belief, morality and character, in the manner of treating others and in the applied systems of socio-political order and governance”.⁴

I begin my review of the source evidence with a discussion of the leading qur’ānic verse on *wasatīyyah*:

Thus We have made of you a community justly balanced that you might be witnesses over the nations and the Messenger a witness over yourselves (al-Baqarah, 2:243)

(Note: Arabic quotations from the Qur’ān and ḥadīth appear under Appendix I at the end).

It is immediately apparent that the portrayal of *wasatīyyah* in this verse occurs in an inter-civilisational context, as the address is to the Muslim community, the *ummah*, in juxtaposition with other communities and nations. The renowned Qur’ān commentator, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1273 CE), wrote that the Muslim *ummah*’s status

2. Cf. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Farfūr, *Al-Wasatīyyah fi’l-islām* (Amman: Dār al-Nafā’is, 1409/1988), 71.

3. Ibid., 27.

4. Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, *Qaḍāyā al-fiqh wa’l-fikr al-mu’āṣir* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1427/2006), 578.

as witnesses is conditional to their commitment to moderation and truth - as testimony of extremists who transgress the limits of moderation is inadmissible. The *ummah* is also a forgiving and just community, with the capacity to mediate between people and demonstrate by its very existence the mercy and justice of God. The verse also specifies the manner in which this *ummah* should relate to other communities and nations, most of whom had their own scriptures and prophets that guided them and showed them the path to deliverance.⁵

Al-Alūsī (d. 1812), the author of *Tafsīr al-maʿānī*, drew a similar conclusion, that a commitment to *wasatīyyah* is essentially a commitment to justice. To be a witness over other nations does not signify “superiority for this *ummah* over other nations who were recipients of divine guidance and prophets that delivered God’s messages to them and advised them”.⁶ Another famous Qur’ān commentator, al-Qurṭubī (d. 1263), pointed out that: “Our Prophet and our *ummah* witness that the previous prophets faithfully fulfilled their missions, and our Prophet testifies also that he faithfully accomplished his mission to us”. Al-Zamakhsharī’s (d. 1180) commentary on this verse points out that “the middle, or *wasat*, is the best choice as it is protected by its peripheries against corruption and collapse”.⁷ In making these remarks, the Qur’ān commentators have in fact echoed the purport of a *ḥadīth* that al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī have both recorded in which the Prophet said in reference to the verse in question: “This *ummah* is a witness over the bygone nations regarding the guidance they received from their prophets and the Messenger of God testifies as to their uprightness”.⁸ The

5. ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū’l-Fidā’ Ismā’il Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, 1:190.

6. Maḥmūd b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, Deoband (India): Idārat al-Ṭibā’ah al-Muṣṭafā’iyyah, 1970), 2:4.

7. Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, and al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf* both quoted in al-Zuhaylī (*Qadāyā*, 550).

8. Muḥammad b. Ismā’il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb faḍā’il aṣḥāb al-Nabī. This long *ḥadīth* elaborates: “On the Day of Judgment the Prophet Noah will be asked: ‘Have you accomplished your mission?’ He replies: ‘Yes’, Then Noah’s

Qur'ānic conception of the *ummah* is of a community united in faith which can best be achieved through moderation and justice.

A contemporary observer also wrote that *wasatīyyah* manifests the manner in which an Islamic civilisation should relate to other world civilisations. This is a dynamic relationship involving reciprocity and exchange that is not overwhelmed nor dominated by either side. Islam's principle of *tawhīd* (Divine Oneness) sets the basic framework of relations among nations on the basis of equal fraternity that nurtures recognition and friendship. Divisions into groups and nations are acceptable but should be guided by the quest to attain moral excellence.⁹ 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Farfūr, the author of *Al-Wasatīyyah fī'l-Islām*, noted that witnessing in this verse signifies commitment to truth and justice. To be a witness one must be upright and nurture a critical attitude towards oneself and others. The verse also calls for a certain civilisational awareness (*al-wa'y al-ḥaḍārī*) over the role and place of Islam in the historical cycle of civilisations.¹⁰

A certain self-awareness of the *ummah* in her relationships with other communities and civilisations is implied in the verse under review. This is because moderation acquires its fuller meaning when it is understood in relation to ones peers and outsiders and not just by looking inwardly at oneself. Then again, to take a middle posture and see oneself as a witness over others from this platform necessarily involves an overall vision of ones own cultural and civilisational attributes to be able to answer the inevitable question

people would be asked to confirm, but they deny that they were given any warning. Then Noah is asked if he has any witness – and he replies that Muḥammad and his *ummah* are his witnesses – and then the latter do testify in support of Noah's statement. See Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, *Ṣafwat al-tafāsīr* (Jakarta: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), 1:102-103.

9. Aḥmad al-Rāwī, "Al-Wasatīyyah wa'l-bu'd al-ḥaḍārī," paper presented at the international conference *Al-Wasatīyyah Manhaj Ḥayāt*, Kuwait, 21-23 May 2005/13-15 Rabī' al-Ākhir 1426, p. 3. We may note in passing that this observation is basically a rehash of the Qur'ānic verse 49:13.

10. Al-Farfūr, *Al-Wasatīyyah*, 144-145.

whether one really qualifies, on the positive scale of good values, to be a witness over others! Hence the conclusion that the notion of *al-wa'y al-hadāri* is embedded in this verse - also supported by an overall reading of the Qur'ān, which is a narrative in common humanity and when it speaks of commitment to such values as truth, justice, promotion of good and prevention of evil, it does so from a broad universal perspective. Yet there is also a clear recognition of pluralism and differentiation among peoples and nations and the idea that excel one another only through virtuous conduct that is tempered by the sense, in every case, of moderation and balance.

The Prophet himself has been addressed in the Qur'ān in the following way: “And become moderate in thy pace (*waqṣid fī mashyika*), and lower thy voice...” (31:19). Whether one reads this verse literally or metaphorically (but preferably the latter), it can sustain both meanings: to moderate one’s “pace” and one’s “voice” signifies a cultural refinement and courtesy in one’s encounter with others; it also implies moderation and balance in the context of contacts with other communities and civilisations. The verse, moreover, embodies a principle of good leadership as it was addressed to the Prophet in his leadership role and reflects not just on his personal conduct, but also the necessity of moderate leadership in religious and community affairs. The key word in this verse (i.e. *waqṣid*) is a derivative of *iqtiṣād*, which is synonymous with *wasatīyyah*, and the two instances of its occurrence in two other *ḥadīths* I shall presently review are also relevant to this meaning. In one of these, the Prophet is reported to have said: “one who observes moderation will not be afflicted with penury – *mā ‘alā man iqtaṣada*.”¹¹ In another *ḥadīth*, which is considered to be an elevated (*marfū‘*) on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, the Prophet has said: “In all matters the middle-most is the best choice – *khayr al-umūri awsaṭuhā*.”¹²

11. Quoted in al-Farfūr, *Al Wasatīyyah*, 56.

12. Al-Zuḥaylī (*Qaḍāyā*, 550), adds that according to another report, this elevated *ḥadīth* has been attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib but that there was ambiguity in the chain of narration, or *sanad*, of this *ḥadīth*. A *marfū‘ḥadīth* is one that does

In a similar saying which Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī has considered to be a *ḥadīth* but which his commentator, Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Irāqī attributes to the fourth Caliph ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the believers are addressed as follows:

You are to hold on to the average medium (*al-nāmāt al-awsat*) to which the ones higher (often need to) descend and the ones below (aspire to) ascend.¹³

Jābir b. Samūrah also reported:

I used to pray together with the Prophet [p.b.u.h]; his prayer was moderate (*qaṣḍan* - not too long) and so was his sermon.¹⁴

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, furthermore, regards moderation as the “golden mean” and pivotal, as such, to Islam’s outlook, which describes our relationship to God, His universe and our fellow humans. “In all things be moderate. Do not do the pace and do not be stationary nor be slow. Do not be talkative nor be silent. Do not be loud and do not be timid nor half-hearted. Do not be pessimistic and do not be gullible. Do not be too confident nor let yourself be easily cowed down.”¹⁵

It is clear that not all people are equally endowed with the ability to embody these qualities, as individuals differ in their natural propensities and are exposed to a variety of influences in

not reach the Prophet himself through a reliable chain of narration but it is likely to have originated from him. A Companion is not likely to make a leading statement such as this, as of his own accord. Hence it is likely to have originated from the Prophet.

13. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1400/1980, 2nd ed.), 2:87. Al-‘Irāqī’s commentary appears in the attached footnotes.

14. Muslim b. Ḥajjāj al-Nishābūrī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1987, 6th ed.), 114, *ḥadīth* no. 417. Dual meanings – the literal and the metaphorical – of Qur’ān passages can also be noted in the verse “And weigh with correct scales” – *wa-zinū bi’l-qistās al-mustaqīm* (26:182).

15. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (transl.), *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an. Translation and Commentary* (Beltsville MD: Amana Publications, 1992), n. 3,604.

their upbringing and experience. This is the purport also of the following qur'ānic passage:

We entrusted Our Book to those of Our servants whom We have chosen. There are those among them who transgress against themselves, those who are moderate (*muqtaṣid*), and those who are assiduous in good works (35:32).

It seems that all the three classes of people are deemed to be the worthy recipients of God's messages, but the general tone of the verse implies that those who excel in good works merit distinction and praise. A question may then arise in this connection as to whether the verse implies that some kind of mediocrity is attached to the middle category. It is submitted that moderation stands on a plane of its own and the verse here does not detract of the objective value and profile of *wasatīyyah*. For instance, worship of God is a cardinal virtue, yet moderation is advised even in that context, as I shall presently explain. Qur'ān commentators – especially Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) – have thus noted:

Every virtue stands in between two extremes; when we speak of generosity, for instance, it is the middle posture between prodigality and niggardliness, and so is courage that stands in the middle of audacity and cowardliness. Virtues thus acquire their meaning from a certain sense of balance and aversion to either side of the two extremes. Hence the mid-most positions are virtuous and the extremes partake in turpitude (*fa'l-awsaṭ faḍā'il wa'l-atraf radhā'il*).¹⁶

Islam also teaches that acts of virtue can lose their attributes if taken to extremes. To be charitable is a virtue, but becomes questionable if taken to such an excess so that one deprives one's family of their financial needs. One concludes then that the objective merit of *wasatīyyah* also extends to good and righteous deeds and the sum-total of the conduct and character of a person is measured by its proximity to moderation.

16. Fakhr al-Dīn b. 'Umar al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (also known as *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, and *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*) (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1978/1398), 2:292.

Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 1390) has highlighted three of the most important virtues and natural endowments of the individual as being wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), purity (*al-'iffah*), and courage (*al-shajā'ah*). The first is concerned with intellectual ability and the power of judgment, the second with subjugation of, and control over, the temptations of the senses, and the third with the overcoming of fear and selfishness. All these virtues develop through moderation and the avoidance of extremes. But when all the three combine and converge, the end result is justice (*al-'adālah*) in the sense of optimal equilibrium and moderation.¹⁷

Choosing a middle course between the affairs of this world and those of the Hereafter, in a way that does not compromise other concerns is the course the Qur'ān recommends:

Seek by means of the wealth that God has granted you the Abode of the Hereafter, but forget not of your share in this world (28:77).

Abstinence that verges on self-denial from taking one's fair share of the enjoyments of this life is thus not piety, and it is preferable that God's material favours are utilised in one's life. It does not, however, give one licence to neglect the Hereafter and the responsibility to be charitable.

With regard to financial management, it is once again the middle course between the two extremes that the Qur'ān recommends:

And tie not your hand to your neck nor stretch it out to its utmost reach lest it may leave you sitting in destitution and rebuke (17:28).

The true servants of the Merciful are) those who are neither extravagant nor niggardly in their spending but keep to the golden mean between the two (25:67).

17. Sa'd al-Dīn b. Mas'ūd b. 'Umar al-Taftazānī, *Al-Talwīḥ 'alā'l-tawḍīḥ*, on the margin of 'Ubayd Allāh b. Mas'ūd Ṣadr al-Sharī'ah, *Al-Tawḍīḥ fī ḥall ghawāmid al-tanqīḥ* (Cairo: Bab al-Ḥalabī), 2:48-49.

Is it a coincidence that the principal verse of *wasatiyyah* we discussed at the very outset (i.e., 2:143) occurs in the middle of the longest chapter (al-Baqarah) of the Qur'an, which consists of exactly 286 verses? The Qur'an is replete with signs; the *āyāt*, and the implications here maybe to signify *wasatiyyah* as the longest engagement in perpetual refinement of the Islamic worldview and civilisation.

Bringing Ease (*al-taysir*) and the Removal of Hardship (*raf' al-ḥaraj*)

The Muslim personality and social organisation reaches perfection by internalising as much as possible the qualities that receive God's own illustrious approval as stipulated as such in the scriptural sources of Islam. Bringing ease to the people and averting hardship to them are highly placed in the hierarchy of Islamic values as we read in the Qur'an:

God intends every facility for you and He intends not to put you in hardship (2:185).

God does not intend to lay any hardship upon you; rather he wants to purify you and complete His favour upon you (5:6).

God does not intend to make religion as a means of hardship to you (22:78).

One of the manifestations of extremism is an obsessive pursuit of finding fault in others and making exacting demands on them. The noble Prophet has condemned this in a *ḥadīth* when he urged the Muslims to “avoid extremism (*al-ghuluw*), for people before you were led to destruction because of their extremism in religion”.¹⁸ He also condemned the extremists when he said: “Perished are the hair-splitters”, and he repeated this three times.¹⁹

18. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Ibn Ḥanbal*, vol. 5, *ḥadīth* no. 3,655.

19. Muslim, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 481, *ḥadīth* no. 1,824.

The spirit of Divine forgiveness is also demonstrated in a qur'ānic verse addressing the believers:

If you avoid the most heinous of the prohibited conduct (*kabā'ira mā tunhawna 'anhu*), We shall conceal all your sins and admit you to a gate of great honour (4:31).

Avoidance of major sins is thus understood to conceal minor ones, an indication that God will forgive the latter when the believer exercises self-restraint. Al-Qaraḍāwī has concluded from this verse that it is sufficient for us to comply with the principal teachings of Islam and avoid the major sins to gain the grace and pleasure of our Creator.²⁰

When two of the leading Companions, Mu'ādh b. Jabal and Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, were leaving as judges to the Yemen, the Prophet's instructions to them were to "be gentle to the people and avoid harshness to them; bring them good news and do not repel them (with gloomy predicaments)".²¹ According to another *ḥadīth*: "Compassion (*al-rifq*) fails not to bring beauty in everything, and it is not taken away from anything without causing ugliness".²² The Prophet's widow 'Āishah reported that her husband, the Prophet, was always inclined towards preventing hardship and lightening the people's burdens as far as possible. Thus she went on record to say that, "he [the Prophet] did not choose but the easier of the two alternatives so long as it did not amount to a sin".²³ The Prophet has also advised the believers to take advantage of the concessions God has granted to them, for "God loves to see that His concessions are taken, just as He loves to see that His commandments are obeyed".²⁴ Thus we read in regard to fasting

20. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "Min al-ghuluw wa'l-inḥilāl ilā'l-waṣāṭiyyah wa'l-i'tidāl," in: Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt, *Mustaqbal al-islām fī'l-qarn al-hijrī al-khāmis al-ashar* (Amman: n.p., 1425/2005), 304.

21. Muslim, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 294, *ḥadīth* no. 1,112.

22. Ibid., 474, *ḥadīth* no. 1,783.

23. Ibid., 412, *ḥadīth* no. 1,546.

24. Cf., Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *I'lām al-muwaqqi'īn 'an Rabb al-Ālamīn*, ed. M. Munīr al-Dimashqī (Cairo: Idārat al-Ṭibā'ah al-Muniriyyah, n.d.), 2:242.

(of Ramadan) that, “It is not a virtue to observe the fast when one is travelling (*laysa min al-birr al-ṣawmu fī'l-safar*).”²⁵

To show fortitude and forbearance (*samāḥah*) in one’s treatment of others is highly recommended. *Samāḥah* is defined as “commendable easiness in matters in which people usually incline toward sternness and severity (*tashdīd*) provided it does not lead to a mischief”.²⁶ The Qur’ān thus records a word of praise for “those who swallow their anger and grant forgiveness to the people. For truly God loves those who are good to others” (3:134). God’s pleasure is also granted to the faithful “who turn away from indulgence in futility” (40:3). To avoid futile speech is an indication of good faith, as in the following *ḥadīth*: “Whoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him speak when he has something good to say, or else remain silent.”²⁷ One who practices *samāḥah* in his daily life also records an act of merit on every instance as held by this *ḥadīth*: “May the mercy of God be on one who is lenient (*samḥan*) when he sells, lenient when he buys, and lenient when he makes a demand.”²⁸

Samāḥah is thus praised in trading activities, which does not, however, extend to an affluent debtor who refuses to repay his debt – as the *ḥadīth* provides: “procrastination by an affluent (debtor) is oppression – *maṭl al-ghanī zulmun*.”²⁹ As for the debtor who is unable to pay, the Qur’ān provides the following directive: “Should the debtor be in hardship, then grant him a respite until his condition eases, but if you make a charity of it, it is indeed better” (2:280).

A juristic conclusion drawn from these guidelines is that bringing ease to, and removal of hardship from, the people are among the

25. ‘Abd Allāh al-Khaṭīb al-Tabrizī, *Mishkāt al-maṣābiḥ*, ed. M. Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1399/1979, 2nd ed.), vol. 3, *ḥadīth* no. 2021.

26. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Ashūr, *Maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah al-islāmīyah* (Tūnis: Al-Sharikat al-Tūnisiyyah li’l-Tawzī‘, 1988), 269.

27. Muslim, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 218, *ḥadīth* no. 844.

28. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Aṣqalānī, *Jawāhir Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *ḥadīth* no. 275.

29. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, *ḥadīth* no. 2,404, a *ḥadīth* reported on the authority of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar.

goals and purposes of the *shari'ah*. Hence it is not advisable for a ruler, judge or professional jurist (*mufti*) to opt for harsh verdicts in the event where easier and more lenient alternatives can be found.

Moderation and Restraint in Criminal Justice

Justice is a virtue in its own right, a cardinal objective of Islam in all its manifestations, and moderation is closely aligned with justice. Yet it is easy to cross the line of moderation even in a quest for justice, especially with regard to crime. A zealous attitude toward the implementation of penalties is thus not recommended. To observe moderation and restraint in the criminal justice system presents challenges that call for vigilance; often the challenge is the need to strike the right balance between forgiveness and resistance, between literalism and flexibility, between severity and firmness, and also between leniency and neglect.³⁰

The qur'anic guidelines on criminal justice advocate moderation in many ways. To begin with, criminal responsibility is strictly attributed to the perpetrator and no one else: "No soul shall carry the burden of another soul" (39:7 and 53:38). The text is also categorical in declaring that, "There shall be no hostility except against the oppressors" (2:193); and also "Avoid aggression, for God loves not the aggressors" (2:190). All parties in criminal (and even civil) disputes are bound to observe the rules of reciprocity: "Whoever is aggressive toward you, then your response must be proportionate to the aggression inflicted on you" (2:194); and "the recompense of an injury is an injury equal to it. But one who forgives and seeks reconciliation, his reward is with God. For God loves not the oppressors" (42:40).

The disputing parties, as well the prosecutor, witnesses and the judge, indeed all believers are instructed to incline toward leniency and forgiveness: "Should you decide to punish, then punish with the

30. Justice occupies over fifty verses in the Qur'an and a large number of *hadiths*. For details on justice see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom, Equality and Justice in Islam* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2002, pp.103-155.

like of that with which you were afflicted. But if you remain patient, that is indeed the best (course) for those who are patient” (16:126). The same sentiment is manifested in the unqualified language of a renowned *ḥadīth*: “Drop the penalties in all cases of doubt as far as you can. For it is better to err in forgiveness than to make an error in punishment”.³¹

With regard to the so-called prescribed (*ḥudūd*) punishments, space does not permit expatiation as I have elsewhere treated the subject in detail.³² Suffice it to say briefly that the scholastic formulations of the *ḥudūd* and the manner in which they are treated in the standard *fiqh* manuals stand at odds with the qur’ānic textual specifications on the subject. A *ḥadd* punishment is by definition one that is prescribed in the Qur’ān or authentic *ḥadīth*. There are about half a dozen verses in the Qur’ān that specify penalties for adultery, slanderous accusation, theft, highway robbery and murder. There is also a *ḥadīth* that supports the death penalty for apostasy which does not occur in the Qur’ān, and which has been in any case taken out of context in its standard *fiqh* expositions. Whereas the qur’ānic text for every one of the *ḥudūd* offenses imposes a punishment and makes a provision for repentance (*tawbah*) immediately following the punitive clause, the *fiqh* treatment of *ḥudūd* has totally ignored this latter part of the qur’ānic dispensation on the subject. The standard *fiqh* conception of the *ḥudūd* is thus one of fixed and mandatory punishments that leave no space for the notion of rehabilitation and repentance – and the suggested sentencing procedures are also designed in a similar fashion.³³

The Qur’ān also uses the words *ḥadd* and *ḥudūd* in the more general sense of signifying the God-ordained limits concerning

31. Al-Tabrīzī, *Mishkāt al-maṣābiḥ*, 2:1061, *ḥadīth* no. 3,570.

32. For fuller information see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Punishment in Islamic Law: An Enquiry into the Hudud Bill of Kelantan* (Kuala Lumpur: Ilmiah Publishers, 2000), 178, and idem, “Punishment in Islamic Law: A Critique of the *Hudud* Bill of Kelantan, Malaysia”, *Arab Law Quarterly* 12 (1998), 203-234.

33. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Punishment in Islamic Law*, 52ff.

the wider arena of human behaviour and conduct, which is not necessarily confined to crimes and penalties. Now if one maintains that the *ḥudūd* are fixed and demand mandatory punishments, this is also a departure from the Qur'ānic conception of *ḥadd*. It would appear, furthermore, that as a result of the absence of material facilities, such as remand and rehabilitation centres, parole, suspended sentence procedures and the like that became available in recent times, the *ḥudūd* presented practical difficulties in dealing with serious crimes, and it seems that the *fiqhī* articulation of *ḥudūd* could not accommodate the repentance/rehabilitation aspects of the Qur'ān – which hence explains their heavy bias towards punishment. If one attempts to integrate the repentance clauses of the text, as one indeed must, then one would have to depart from the notion of fixed and mandatory penalties in favour of penal measures over which the sentencing judge exercises a degree of selectivity and discretion.

The *ḥadīth* on blasphemy/apostasy which simply reads “one who changes his religion shall be killed,”³⁴ was meant for the offense of treason. For all the instances of renunciation of Islam by certain individuals at the time were in this context and there were no lines of distinction between religion and state. The *ḥadīth* was pronounced in a Medina that was in a virtual state of war with the pagans of Mecca: within the space of ten years of the Prophet's life in Medina, there were some 85 military engagements, and he himself took part in 26. There were no grounds for neutrality in that situation. It was believed that a person who renounced Islam in Medina would immediately flee to Mecca, join the Quraysh of Mecca, and fight the Muslims. This was the context, yet the tension so generated by those early years continued. The *ḥadīth* is in any case a general text that is in need of interpretation. Any text which is open to one level of interpretation is consequently downgraded, according to the principles of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, from a definitive (*qaṭ'ī*) to a speculative

34. For discussion of the *isnād* (chain of narrators) and other details concerning this *ḥadīth* see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1997), 93-95.

(*zannī*). The literal meaning of this *ḥadīth* would therefore render liable to capital punishment, for instance, a Hindu who embraces Islam, which was evidently not intended. It is important, therefore, to place the *ḥadīth* in its proper context, which would be treason, and not a peaceful change of religion through personal conviction.³⁵

The spirit of moderation is extended to arrest and pre-trial procedures, suspicion, espionage, indictment and prosecution.³⁶ This is the purport of the qur'ānic verse: "O believers, avoid indulgence in suspicion, for surely suspicion in most cases is sinful, and spy not (on one another)..." (49:12). Suspicion is thus declared to be sinful for the most part, as the wording of the text indicates, thereby leaving some scope for reasonable suspicion that is founded on credible clues for crime detection purposes. The Prophet added his own voice to this when he warned the believers to "beware of suspicion, for suspicion can be tantamount to the worst form of speech; do not spy on one another and do not revile one another."³⁷ The worst form of speech is lying, and suspicion is the insidious lying of the heart which often goes undetected and can be most harmful as its victim is denied the opportunity to defend himself. Turning a blind eye to people's hidden failings while nurturing an atmosphere of fraternity and forgiveness among them is also a recurrent theme of many a renowned *ḥadīth*.³⁸

It is also instructive to find that the Qur'an encourages a sense of fellowship among people that stands on the twin principles of *'adl* and *iḥsān* (justice and being good to others – 16:90). The text thus exhorts believers to "be the agents of good, for God loves those who do good – *wa aḥsinū, inna Allāha yuḥibbu al-muḥsinīn*" (2:195),

35. See for details *ibid*, 33-37.

36. See for fuller details on trial and pre-trial procedures Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "The Right to Personal Safety and the Principle of Legality in *Shari'ah*", *Islamic Studies* 39 (2000), 249- 289.

37. Muslim, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 477, *ḥadīth* no. 1,083.

38. See for details Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1997), 117-130, featuring the Islamic teachings on 'Exposing the Weakness of Others (*kashf al-'awrāt*), and 'Recommended Silence.'

and in another place calls for everyone to “speak to the people in good words” (2: 83). All of this may be seen as a corollary of the unqualified bestowal of dignity on the children of Adam (17:70). The Prophet went a step further when he declared: “None of you is a (true) believer unless he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself,”³⁹ and that “thinking well of others partakes in service to God – *ḥusn al-zann min al-‘ibādah*.”⁴⁰

A Round-up of Some Modern Opinions

Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) made the observation that “Islam has made itself known as a *dīn al-fiṭrah* (religion congenial to human nature) because of its inclination towards moderation”.⁴¹ The renowned Tunisian scholar Muḥammad Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Ashūr (d. 1974) wrote that “in moderation lies the essence of all virtues (*faḍā’il*) and it is a great protector against indulgence in corruption and caprice.”⁴² He also wrote that, “human nature (*al-fiṭrah*) shuns severity and extremism and favours moderation”.⁴³ Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī has similarly observed that moderation is the correct path that leads the *ummah* to its ideals of attaining material and spiritual success: “It is the divinely ordained moral and humanitarian mission of the Muslim community to pursue all its goals through moderation. I also believe that deviation from the path of moderation brings nothing but destruction and loss”.⁴⁴

Muṣṭafā Kamāl al-Tarīzī al-Tūnisī made the observation that one can hardly associate moderation and *wasatīyyah* with any particular aspect of the life of to the exclusion of others. For *wasatīyyah* relates to all aspects of life right across the entire spectrum of Islamic teachings, from dogma and belief to ritual worship, social relations,

39. Muḥy al-Dīn al-Nawawī, *Riyāḍ al-ṣāliḥīn*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: Dar al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1404/1984, 2nd ed.), 113, *ḥadīth* no. 118.

40. Abū Dawud, *Sunan Abū Dawud*, kitāb al-adab, bāb fī ḥusn al-zann.

41. As quoted in al-Farfūr, *Al-Wasatīyyah*, 156.

42. Ibn ‘Ashūr, *Maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, 45.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

44. Al-Qaraḍāwī, “Min al-ghuluw”, 294.

relations among nations, time, place, human thought and the exercise virtually of all of the basic rights and liberties of individuals.⁴⁵ According to ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Farfūr, “there is no easy refuge from the evil consequences of extremism except through embracing the Islamic teachings on moderation, truth and justice”.⁴⁶

Wasatīyyah is manifested, according to Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī, in the balanced attention one pays to one’s rights over, and obligations towards, others as well as to the material and spiritual world. It also signifies a balance between forgiveness and resistance, prodigality and selfishness, and a resolute aversion to extremism and terrorism in all their manifestations. Islam advocates these values, not only among the Muslims themselves, but also in their relations with other communities and nations. *Wasatīyyah* as such is a pillar of Islamic civilisation.⁴⁷

Al-Zuḥaylī added that as a religion of moderation, Islam takes the middle course between peoples and nations, divinely-revealed religions, philosophies, as well as economic doctrines including communism, capitalism and the like. Islam is committed to establishing a system of truth and justice that shuns laxity on one side and extremism on the other.⁴⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr made the following observation regarding a certain geo-physical dimension of *wasatīyyah* in the Qur’ān when he wrote: just as Islam is one of the ‘middle ways’ so too did its territory come to occupy the ‘middle belt’ of the globe, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In this region, Islam came into contact with other civilisations, their philosophies and their sciences – so that the Islamic worldview is informed by the outlook and values of other great traditions.⁴⁹

45. As quoted in al-Farfūr, *Al-Wasatīyyah*, 156.

46. *Ibid.*, 154.

47. Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī, “Al-Taṭarruffī’l-islām,” in: Mu’assasat Āl al-Bayt, *Mustaqbal al-islām fī’l-qarn al-hijrī al-khāmis al-‘ashar* (Amman: n.p., 1425/2005), 223-224.

48. *Ibid.*, 223.

49. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilisation in Islam* (Cambridge: UHP, 2003), 196.

The International Islamic Law Academy (*Majma' al-Fiqh al-Islāmī al-duwalī*) issued a statement at its 13th plenary session in Kuwait (December 2001/1422), which included the following in its third section entitled “Prohibition of Hostility in Islam”:

Islam prohibits aggression without a just cause and all acts that strike terror into the hearts and minds of innocent people, whose lives are immune and protected. Any hostility of this kind falls under the prohibited terrorism... It is also sheer injustice and a form of intellectual terrorism to confuse Islam with terrorism. Nay, it is a religion of moderation and balance.⁵⁰

Al-Qaraḍāwī is right to say that the renowned Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) indulged in extremism by charging the society of his time with disbelief (*kufṛ*) and ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*) and by declaring aggressive jihad against it. Quṭb also erred in his derision of tolerance and denunciation of those who advocated gradual renewal and reform. Qaraḍāwī further observed that the neo-literalists among the Salafīs rigidified “Islamic teachings through their dry literalism and giving of undue importance to formalities such as wearing long beards and long clothes for men and women.”⁵¹

One ought to acknowledge, perhaps, in the same spirit of *wasatiyyah* and balance, that a certain departure from the mainstream path of moderation took place in the history of Islamic legal thought concerning the treatment of women. But I propose to be brief on this issue as I have discussed the subject in detail elsewhere.⁵² But even so I can hardly do better than refer once again to Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī’s insightful comment on this matter: “It is an obligation of the *ummah* to protect the women from the excesses

50. International Islamic Law Academy resolution, as quoted in al-Zuḥaylī, “Al-Taḥarruf”, 222.

51. Al-Qaraḍāwī, “Min al-ghuluw”, 297-298.

52. Cf. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 267-278 and idem, “Islam and the Status of Women under the 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan,” *Arab Law Quarterly* 22 (2008), 1-37.

of the Muslim juristic legacy of the past, and those of the modern West, both of which strip women of their essential humanity”.⁵³ Both need to be corrected through the search for balanced and moderate solutions. Al-Qaraḍāwī then calls for the establishment of an Ummatic Foundation for Moderation in Thought and Culture (*Jam‘iyyat al-ummah al-wasat fī’l-fikr wa’l-thaqāfah*) to vindicate *wasatiyyah* and promote it in the spheres of education, social mores and culture: “This would be an invaluable gift we can pass on to the next generation of Muslims.”⁵⁴

The Environmental Imbalance

From the Islamic perspective, the human species is part and parcel of a cosmic equilibrium that is vital for humanity’s preservation and survival. The God-ordained order of nature is endowed with the capacity to correct its own imbalances. This capacity must be understood and protected against reckless interference, which humanity is capable of bringing about in catastrophic proportions. Instead of preserving and safeguarding the natural balance of the world environment, as they should be in their capacity as the *khalīfah* and vicegerents of God in the earth, human beings have been actively engaged in disturbing it at their own peril. This sinister contemporary scenario is not only the result of materialistic exploitation and greed, but also indicative of a parallel imbalance in ourselves. The alarming environmental degradation we are seeing is a result of modern man’s neglect of the affinity between his spiritual self and his external environment.

Modern economic development has taken an aggressive course which desolates the natural environment in the name of progress. The economic wealth accumulated thus feeds our greed and spiritual insecurity. The age of economic growth has coincided with

53. Al-Qaraḍāwī, “Min al-ghuluw”, 334.

54. Ibid., 294. The reader might be interested to learn that Kuwait has already taken the call and established a *Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Wasatiyyah* (Centre for *Wasatiyyah* Studies) in 2005.

an age of insecurity and anxiety, shown by the relentless drive for weapons of destruction that can annihilate the human race and the planet earth by many folds. In this age of “unyielding despair,” so stoically proclaimed by Bertrand Russell, “modern man is despaired of paradise and therefore has to create hell on earth”.

The Islamic principle of *tawhīd* or, the Divine Oneness of being, is premised in a holistic vision of man and environment and an innate interrelatedness of all that exists in the natural world. This also includes the Qur’ānic notions of the vicegerency (*khilāfah*) and trusteeship (*amānah*) which designate mankind, individually and collectively, as God’s custodians of the earth, and place upon them the responsibility to safeguard not only the rights of their fellow humans but of nature and other creatures. Thus we read in the Qur’ān, “And the earth He has spread out for (all of) His creatures” (55:10), and also that man is charged with the responsibility to be just to all of them. To quote the passage preceding this last verse:

And the firmament has He raised high and He has set the balance that you do not transgress the balance. And therefore observe the balance equitably and do not disturb it (55:7-9).

The overall purpose of the suggested balance is human welfare and the protection of all of God’s creatures on earth and the preservation of the natural environment. Note also the wording of the latter portion of the verse which refers to disturbing the divinely ordained balance as a form of transgression and rebellion (*tughyān* – in the phrase: *an lā taṭghaw fī’l-mīzān*) – that implies prohibition.

The text also provides that among men there are those “who reach the position of power and then go about the earth spreading mischief and laying to waste crops and human life (while knowing that) God does not love mischief-making” (2:205). Note also this prescient declaration of the Qur’ān:

Corruption became rampant in the land and at sea, because of the deeds of men; He may therefore cause them to taste some

of (the consequences of) their deeds. They will then turn away perhaps (and put a stop to corruption) (al-Rūm, 30:41).

Osman Bakar, the author of *Tawhīd and Science: Islamic Perspectives on Religion and Science*, is of the view that in the modern context, “tasting some of their deeds” would refer to the various forms of environmental degradation and pollution which have severely affected the lives of modern men.”⁵⁵

Identification of *Wasatīyyah*

Moderation is normally a natural inclination in people of sound intellect and as such it is not difficult to identify most of the time. Uncertainties do arise, however, as to how it is constructed in reference to complex and controversial issues. Yet any response is likely to prove inadequate in providing a definitive methodology or mechanism. The complexity of the task to identify correct and moderate responses to issues is also not helped by the circumstantial nature of the subject, which is not amenable to predetermined guidelines. Issues of concern to society and culture need to be looked at in their surrounding circumstances. With reference to technical issues of a specialised nature pertaining, for example, to the applied sciences, it is not always the moderate or average position that may be wanting, but one that is correct in the light of the available body of knowledge. This can also be said perhaps with regard to legal and *sharī‘ah*-related matters of specialised content, which may have to be determined in the light of its relevant evidence. One might add to this the proviso that some parts of the *sharī‘ah* are open to fresh interpretation, considerations of public interest (*maṣlahah*), general custom (*‘urf*) and *ijtihād* in which case there may be room for evaluating the various positions, within the *sharī‘ah* in one’s quest to develop novel and well-moderated responses. One is reminded, at this juncture, of the insightful statement of the

55. Email communication. I would like to express my appreciation for Osman Bakar, who read the manuscript of this article, for his helpful suggestions.

great Andalusian thinker, Ibrāhīm al-Shāṭibī (d. 1388), who wrote that “the middle position manifests the greater part of the *sharī‘ah* and the Holy Book – *fā’l-wasaṭ huwā mu‘zam al-sharī‘ah wa umm al-kitāb*”.⁵⁶ Extremism in *sharī‘ah*-related matters can, for instance, be identified in anyone who turns *ḥaram* into *ḥalāl* and vice versa without presenting convincing evidence.

Outside the sphere of specialised knowledge, social custom often provides an important indicator by which moderation can be ascertained with regard especially to issues of public concern. This is indeed the purport of the qur’ānic address to community leaders, and indeed to the generality of Muslims to “take to forgiveness, follow the *‘urf* and turn away from the ignorant” (7:199). The three indicators mentioned here are custom, enlightenment, and an inclination toward leniency. With reference, for example, to determining the amounts of public expenditure allocations for welfare purposes, al-Shāṭibī recommended that this should be ascertained in the light of prevailing custom and opinion of the people of sound intellect⁵⁷.

General consensus of the learned community members, or *ijmā‘*, is another important indicator of balanced opinion and judgment in Islam. Notwithstanding a degree of technicality that has developed in the detailed formulations of *ijmā‘*, its inherent strength as a source of law and judgment, and a great moderator as such, can hardly be underestimated. Consensus is normally preceded by consultation (*shūrā*), itself a qur’ānic principle of special significance in community affairs that must be solicited from all competent members of the public who can give counsel. Whenever consultation leads to consensus, it becomes an important indicator by which to verify balanced and moderate positions in the determination of issues. Consultation and consensus can take a variety of forms,

56. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-ahkām*, annotated by M. Khidr al-Husayn (Cairo: Al-Maṭba‘ah al-Salafiyyah, 1341H), 3:163.

57. *Ibid.*, 2:168.

from the relatively informal village and tribal councils, to the more organised elected assemblies and parliaments, all of which are acceptable, given that they are genuinely representative and their participants enjoy the freedom to voice their views.

Islamic history has known a wide spectrum of doctrines and movements, some even pertaining to issues of concern to the interpretation of the Qur'ān that led to political upheavals and unrest. Note, for instance, the diverging views, during the early decades of the advent of Islam, of the Kharijites (lit. 'outsiders'), the Mu'tazilites (lit. 'secluders') and the Jabarites (lit. 'determinists') on such theological and philosophical issues as to whether the Qur'ān was the created or uncreated speech of God, on the exalted self and attributes of God, free will and predestination as well as political issues of of concern to governance and leadership and so forth. No one, it seems, had the answers, let alone moderate ones – if one could employ the word in such situations at all. What was the middle course of *wasatiyyah* in regard to those issues?

Thanks to the moderating influences of consensus and public opinion, fresh perspectives were advanced to reduce the scope of disagreement: among various views those that presented a middle course were often identified. Extremist factions and advocates of excessive views were isolated and marginalised. The views, for instance, of those who elevated the fourth caliph 'Alī into a deity, or those on the other hand who charged him with disbelief, and some among the Sufis who exhibited extremist tendencies concerning the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) were thus isolated for the most part. Mainstream Islamic scholarship and '*ulamā'* have also denied recognition and support, for instance, to the Umayyad ruler Mu'āwiyah who turned the republican style Caliphate into a monarchy. This was due mainly to general consensus and the balance of learned opinion that materialised over time, and the mainstream community proved receptive and accepting, although differences of opinion and *ikhtilāf* over many issues remained. Since *ikhtilāf* was accepted as a part of discursive engagement in intellectual issues,

consensus on core issues coexisted with certain levels of divergences and disagreements on others.

Islamic political thought suffered however from the excesses of authoritarian and absolutist rulers who paid little attention to the necessity of integrating consultation and consensus into their methods of governance. Procedural and institutional mechanisms were needed to turn *shūrā* and *ijmā'* into decision-making processes within the Islamic system of rule. This might explain the propensity of political and theological differences that often led to civic seclusion or withdrawal by the opposition factions, or else to open mutiny and *khurūj* (challenging the legitimacy of rule), which often perpetuated despotism and social imbalance. These shortcomings in the Islamic political thought are manifested in the absence of mechanisms to identify moderate and consensus-based responses to issues. Without wishing to delve into details, a point that emerges from this analysis may be that *wasatīyyah* and the search for the moderate mean is of relevance more to socio-political, religious and cultural issues, and not so much to expert opinion and scientific knowledge.

Having acknowledged some of the limitations of *wasatīyyah*, it remains to be said that the intrinsic strength of this golden mean of Islamic teachings can hardly be overestimated, even with reference sometimes to technical matters of scientific nature. I shall avoid extending this discussion into the larger discourse of Islam and science, as this merits a separate treatment.⁵⁸ Let it suffice it to say that technology and science alone cannot determine moral values nor can it provide a balanced sense of direction informed by humanitarian factors of relevance to the health of society and civilisation. Since the Prophet himself and his Companions have

58. For a discussion see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Islam, Rationality and Science", *Islam and Science* 1 (June 2003), 56-77 and idem, "Reading the Signs. A Qur'anic Perspective on Thinking," *Islam and Science* 4 (Winter 2006), 181-205. A fuller treatment of the subject from the viewpoints of *sharī'ah* and theology can be found in Osman Bakar, *Tawhīd and Science: Islamic Perspectives on Religion and Science* (Kuala Lumpur: Arah Publications, 2008, 2nd ed.).

approved of moderation and opted for just and moderate positions at almost every opportunity, these principles become a beacon of light of universal significance in Islamic thought and civilisation.

Islam Hadhari

The current Prime Minister of Malaysia, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, introduced *Islam Hadhari* (civilisational Islam) in his landmark speech at the September 2004 General Assembly of the ruling UMNO (United Malay National Organisation) party. *Islam Hadhari* has since then remained the principal theme of a number of speeches he has delivered on various occasions in Malaysia and abroad. Most of these speeches were subsequently compiled into two volumes, both published in Kuala Lumpur in 2006: one was entitled *Islam Hadhari: A Model Approach For Development and Progress* (182 pages) and the other constitutes one of the part of a larger book, entitled in both Malay and English *Pembangunan Modal Insan: Human Capital Development* (266 pages).

In his first book, Abdullah Badawi defines *Islam Hadhari* as “an approach that emphasises development consistent with the tenets of Islam, and focuses on enhancing the quality of life” (p. 60). Elsewhere he recapitulated and explained: “It [Islam Hadhari] aims to achieve this via the mastery of knowledge, the development of the individual and the nation, the implementation of a dynamic, trading and financial system, and the pursuit of integrated and balanced development of people to become pious and capable, with care for the environment and protection of the weak and disadvantaged”.⁵⁹ *Islam Hadhari* also represents an attempt on the part of the Malaysian leadership to broaden the scope of the Islamic discourse to include the broader civilisational teachings and objectives of Islam, thus projecting the values of moderation, social harmony, people’s welfare and economic development. It

59. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, *Pembangunan Modal Insan: Human Capital Development* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN), 2006), 143.

also formulates a response to the challenges of modernity as well as Western hegemony and its drive to shape the cultural values of other communities in the name of globalisation.

The ten sub-themes of *Islam Hadhari* that Abdullah Badawi has specified constitute a cluster of principles and objectives such as faith in God and piety, good governance, a vigorous pursuit of knowledge, cultural and moral integrity, protection of the rights of women and minorities and so forth in the light of Islamic teachings. It is also an attempt on the part of Malaysian leadership to contain the challenges posed by the oppositional 'Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party' (PAS) with reference especially to its demands for the formation of what it perceived to be an 'Islamic state', implementation of the *hudūd* penalties, and gender-based restrictions. To quote Abdullah Badawi:

In my country, the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, popularly known as PAS, has politicised religion to the extent that it claims a monopoly of Islam. They canvass for votes by telling villagers that they would be assured of heaven if they vote for PAS [...]. While Malaysian political choices are to some extent influenced by the issues of religiosity, what is actually more important to the voters are the issues of good governance and broad-based economic growth.⁶⁰

The very first of the ten principles of *Islam Hadhari* proposes faith in God and piety as its foundational framework, and religion generally features prominently in Abdullah Badawi's writings. With regard to the practice of Islam, a certain degree of imbalance is noted not only among the Muslims of Malaysia, but also in the wider *ummah*, manifested by the disproportionate attention that is often given to ritualism at the expense of the broader universal teachings of Islam. In an attempt to introduce the desired balance, Abdullah wrote:

While we recognise that rituals are important [...]. We also believe that as Muslims we must also understand the spirit

60. Idem, *Islam Hadhari: A Model Approach for Progress and Development* (Kuala Lumpur: MPH Publications, 2006), 58-59.

and ultimate objectives of our religion. We also believe that rituals alone will not make us good Muslims. We are enjoined to find success in this world and in the Hereafter. We must therefore never forget about progress in this world.⁶¹

Abdullah further observed that the widespread scholastic orientation of the Muslim masses has brought about a certain rigidity that has negatively impacted the development of Islamic law: “The notion that the Islamic concept of law is absolute and hence immutable, has resulted in a sort of intellectual catatonia among some scholars.”⁶² He quotes Muhammad Iqbal’s (d. 1937) observation on this point: “[...] the teaching of the Qur’an that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessor, should be permitted to solve its own problems”.⁶³ The obvious message here is to seek a balanced blend of the old and the new and to address modern social issues in the backdrop of the cumulative wisdom that can moderate the twin concerns of continuity and change.

Islam Hadhari explains its own *raison d’être* in the light of certain problems that call for attention and response. A number of issues have thus been identified, as Abdullah Badawi explains: “There are a few key areas which the Muslim world needs to prioritise...” and he elaborates them in detail, which may be summarised as follows. First, a commitment to good governance, which “must be demonstrated through best practices, righteous conduct and moral leadership, accountability, justice and the rule of law”.⁶⁴ Another ‘key area’, that presents a considerable challenge, is to encourage reform and renewal in Islamic thought. He says that, “by opening up discursive space in the Muslim world, we enrich our intellectual tradition and directly challenge the extremist doctrines that have

61. Ibid., 42.

62. Ibid., 57.

63. Ibid., 58.

64. Ibid., 56.

been linked to Islam over the last few years”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, he calls for a concerted effort to eradicate poverty, which is a “mandatory commandment of Islam”.⁶⁶ This also explains Abdullah’s ubiquitous emphasis on economic development. Education is another area that calls for renewed emphasis and attention: “*Islam Hadhari* places a high premium on the ability of the government to provide educational opportunities [...]. Indeed the prominence given to education is nothing new to Islamic Civilisation”.⁶⁷ Women’s rights to equality are another priority subject of *Islam Hadhari*, which seeks to “ensure that the rights of women are protected and that they fulfil their potential without having to face artificial barriers constructed in the name of Islam”.⁶⁸

Abdullah adds to his list of priorities the declaration that Islam abhors and condemns terrorism. “Terrorists must be singled out only by their acts of terror and nothing else [...]. We must address the root causes, whatever they may be”.⁶⁹ In addressing these issues, Abdullah Badawi primarily speaks for his own country but the message he conveys addresses all Muslims: “As far as Malaysia is concerned, I believe we have tried to walk the middle path of moderation. We have committed ourselves to the qur’ānic exhortation in Sūrah 2:143: ‘Thus have we made you an *ummah* justly balanced’”. This is “a divine reminder,” Abdullah adds “for Muslims to observe and practice moderation, and avoid the extremes”.⁷⁰

Having emerged in the pluralist environment of Malaysia, *Islam Hadhari* seeks to advance social harmony and pluralism among the various ethnic and religious groups in the country. Whereas the 1957 Federal Constitution of Malaysia declares Islam as the religion of the

65. Abdullah, *Islam Hadhari*, 56.

66. *Ibid.*, 90.

67. *Ibid.*, 153.

68. *Ibid.*, 62.

69. *Ibid.*, 68.

70. *Ibid.*, 42.

federation, it also grants unhindered freedom of creed and the practice and propagation of religion for the non-Muslims peoples of Malaysia. Ethnic and religious pluralism had always been the two most engaging motifs of government in Malaysia – so much so that hardly any major decisions are made without due consideration of the pluralism in this country. Malaysian leaders have consistently spoken in favour of moderation and compromise in their policies, and it is due to these that Malaysia has remained stable and economically successful. According to Abdullah, “Malaysia is a multi-religious and multiracial country. I would like to re-emphasise that *Islam Hadhari* is meant for the benefit of all in Malaysia, regardless of their religious or racial identities [...]. We wish to capitalise on the interracial tolerance we already observe and on the inter-faith coexistence we already practice”.⁷¹

Conclusion

I would like to summarise my conclusions in five points as follows:

1. Moderation and avoidance of extremism are moral virtues and valuable guidelines for the conduct of individuals as well as societies and civilisations. They are of concern not only to Islam and Muslims, the main focus of this essay, but also to humanity at large. We have witnessed the unfortunate rise of extremism and violence, especially after the tragedy of September 2001, and the persistent misunderstanding of Islam which poses a growing threat to world peace. There is evidently a need for all concerned to reflect on how best to contain this threat and restore normality in international relations.

Militarism and violence signify the failure of moderation and a departure from its path. They need to be brought under control. We do recognise that crimes and acts of injustice almost always call for strong measures to protect society from violence, but one ought to moderate one’s response to acts of

71. *Ibid.*, 102 and 106.

evil by an accurate identification of the problem, bring the perpetrators to justice, effectively administering justice, and strictly condemning aggression against entire communities and nations. Acts of violence against civilian populations, the innocent and the uninvolved violate the recognised norms and teachings of Islam and cannot be justified in any form. We also recognise that Islam, like most other legal traditions, advocates fighting against injustice and the right to self-defence against aggression.

2. Equilibrium is likely to prevail in a society that enjoys sustained periods of peaceful co-existence internally and externally in its relations with other communities and nations. It is just as likely to be disturbed when overt participation in extreme conduct goes unnoticed or ignored and the society and its leaders remain oblivious to challenges that threaten social harmony and peace.

In the sphere of government, the national charter and constitution are the main instruments which establish a system of checks and balances on the exercise of power. One of the challenging issues of concern in many countries in the Muslim world is a lack of effective enforcement of their existing constitutions. This causes persistent imbalances that are often manifested in the prevalence of dictatorship. One can hardly expect equilibrium in an environment characterised by disrespect for the rule of law.

3. Education and the media play crucial roles by providing balanced advice and paying attention to societal issues. These and every other component of the social organism perform their functions best when they are well calibrated and internally balanced. Our education systems and media are often overwhelmed by unsolicited influences from other civilisations that often need to be checked and rectified. Education in the Muslim world is still dominated by Western

methodologies and doctrines, hence the persistent challenge of moderating these with Islamic input in public education. The artificial dualities between modern and traditional education, and its parallel dualism of the civil and *shari'ah* law in the courts, are indicative of imbalances between the concerns of modern society and tradition, between religious and secular values and between continuity and change. Consultative engagement among experts and community leaders as well as effective decision-making mechanisms are needed to articulate balanced and comprehensive answers to issues. Education in the Muslim world should seek to strike a balance between the mastery of revealed knowledge on the one hand, and originality and critical thinking on the other.

The commercialisation of knowledge is yet another trend that needs to be balanced with a blend of academic and cultural influences to ensure that profit-generation is not overly emphasised in higher education. This however should not result in a compromise on pragmatism and the neglect of beneficial knowledge.

4. Pluralist societies are difficult to manage as pluralism often presents challenging prospects of conceiving a correct alignment and the need to balance conflicting interests within the crucible of unity. Disequilibrium of the major components of pluralism often bodes instability and unrest. Facile answers are obviously not adequate, and every society, including Malaysia, must remain open to healthy adjustment all the time. Yet it should be mentioned that, compared with many other Muslim countries, Malaysia has a favourable record of adjustment to the challenges of pluralism. It also augurs well that in the wake of 2008 election fresh issues of concern to ethnic and religious relations continue to engage Malaysia in its quest for more refined levels of social equilibrium.

5. Finally, the call for the civilisational regeneration and renewal of the Muslim world, which Malaysia is spearheading through its proposed focus on the broader civilisational goals of Islam, is a valid one as the Islamic revivalist discourse in recent decades has on the whole been dominated by hard-line interpretations of the ritualistic and legalistic aspects of Islam, coupled by partisan concerns and failed promises of political reform. The Islamic discourse needs to address the challenges of contemporary society more openly and widen its scope to include civilisational values of universal significance that speak for the *ummah* as a whole. If *Islam Hadhari* offers the desired balance of values, it has to be supported by wider levels of agreement and consensus within and outside Malaysia. This has yet to materialise. Within Malaysia, fresh levels of consultative engagement and consensus need to be sought for *Islam Hadhari*, and parallel efforts could in the meantime continue to generate understanding and support for it outside Malaysia.⁷² ❁

72. A certain level of engagement by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, the Al-Azhar University and many prominent voices in the Muslim world is taking place, which may well inspire wider levels of agreement and support. See for details, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Civilisational Renewal: Revisiting the Islam Hadhari Approach* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, 2008), p. 40ff.

INDEX OF QUR'AN AND HADITH TEXTS

- وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا. (البقرة: 143)
- وَأَقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَاغْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ. (لقمان: 19)
- ولا عال من اقتصد.
- خير الأمور أوسطها.
- عليكم بالنمط الأوسط الذي يرجع إليه العالی ويرتفع إليه التالی.
- كنت أصلى مع النبی صلی اله علیه وسلم الصلوات، كانت صلاته قصدا وخطبته قصدا.
- ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مُقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ يُأْتِنُ اللَّهُ. (الفاطر: 32)
- وَأَتَّبِعْ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الذَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيْبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِنْ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفَسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ. (القصص: 77)
- وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَى عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَحْسُورًا. (الإسراء: 29)
- وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا. (الفرقان: 67)
- يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ. (البقرة: 185)
- مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ. (المائدة: 6)
- وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ. (الحج: 78)
- إياكم و الغلو في الدين ، فإنما هلك الذين من قبلكم بالغلو في الدين.
- هلك المنتطعون، هلك المنتطعون، هلك المنتطعون.
- إِنْ تَجْتَنِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلِكُمْ مَدْخَلَ كَرِيمًا. (النساء: 31)
- يسروا ولا تعسروا و بشروا ولا تنفروا.
- لايدخل الرفق في شئ ولا يترع من شئ إلا شانه.
- إنه ما خير من الأمرين إلا أيسرهما ما لم يكن إثمًا.
- إن الله يحب أن تؤتى رخصه كما يحب أن تؤتى عزائمه.
- ليس من البر الصوم في السفر.
- الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ. (البقرة: 143)
- وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ. (المؤمنون: 3)

من كان يؤمن بالله واليوم الآخر ، فليقل خيرا أو ليصمت .
رحم الله عبدا سمحا اذا باع ، سمحا اذا اشترى ، سمحا اذا اقتضى .
مطل الغنى ظلم .

وَإِنْ كَانَ ذُو عُسْرَةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ مَيْسَرَةٍ وَأَنْ تَصَدَّقُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ. (البقرة: 280)

وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ (الزمر: 7)

أَلَّا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ. (النجم: 38)

فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ. (البقرة: 193)

وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ. (القرة: 190)

فَمَنْ اعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ. (البقرة: 194)

ادروا الحدود عن المسلمين ما استطعتم فإن كان له مخرج فخلوا سبيله فإن الإمام أن يخطئ في العفو خير من أن يخطئ في العقوبة .

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَحَسَّسُوا. (الحجرات: 12)

يَا أَيُّكُمْ وَالظَّنَّ فَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ أَكْذَبُ الْحَدِيثِ وَلَا تَحَسَّسُوا وَلَا تَحَسَّسُوا .

إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِأَمْرٍ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ. (النحل: 90)

وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ. (البقرة: 195)

وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا. (البقرة: 83)

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبُرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ

مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا. (الإسراء: 70)

لا يجب أحدكم حتى يجب لأخيه ما يجب لنفسه .

حسن الظن من العبادة .

وَالْأَرْضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلْأَنَامِ. (الرحمن : 10)

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ.

(الرحمن: 7-9)

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَىٰ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ. (البقرة: 205)

ظَهَرَ الْفُسَادُ فِي الْبُرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ. (الروم:

41)

خُدِ الْعَفْوُ وَأْمُرٌ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرَاضٌ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ. (الأعراف: 199)