**MODERATION**

Moderation “wasatiya” in Arabic language demonstrates mastering the middle stance. Linguists give it multiple significances but they all lead to the same end; the “middle” is fairness. Middle is the centre between any two opposites; one opposite is commendable while the other is lamentable.

Moderation is a commendable behaviour (whether physical or moral). It safeguards us from slipping into opposite (or diverging) extremes that fall under the spell of either excessiveness or extremism; whether in the domain of religion of life. Ibnul-Qayem says, “Allah has not ordained any command except that Satan has two incitements in it; negligence and dereliction on the one side, and extremism and exaggeration on the other. He cares not in which trap of the two you fall as long as you eventually fall.” When one reads the Qur’an and Sunnah thoroughly, one realises that Islam is essentially moderation so long as it does not deviate from justice, choice, integrity and balance. These are indeed the principles that Islam came to propagate! Ibnul-Qayem says, “The whole of religion of Allah lies between these two ends; negligence and extravagance!”

Following the events of 9/11 the whole Islamic nation felt a real urge to convey the true message of Islam and moderation. They felt a real urge to spread this notion among others. So the moderation of Islam emerged as an authentic tool that can be used to confront the challenges of the modern age and protect Islam at the same time. It is indeed the logical alternative for solving tough problems; a moderation that encompasses legislation, society, politics, economy, culture and education.

**Moderation and Truth**

Moderation is based on truth and understanding, without which Muslims might fall into extremism such as being unnecessarily strict to himself or others, treating all truths as subjective and accusing others who disagree with his theological position as heretics.

**Category of truth**

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, truth is divided into two broad categories; definitive truth and subjective truth. The superiority of the two is assessed on two attributes; a) authenticity and b) meaning. The quality of each attribute, in turn, is determined by its definitiveness or non-definitiveness.

Authenticity is given more importance than meaning and definitiveness is superior to non-definitiveness. Only theological issues that are **definitive in authenticity and meaning** are regarded by Muslim scholars as definitive truth whereas the rest are subjective truth.

Some examples of definitive truth in Islam based on scriptural evidences are:

1. Prohibition of murder in Islam - “and do not take any human being’s life – [the life] which God has declared to be sacred [emphasis added]- otherwise than in [the pursuit of] justice.” (The Qur’an, 6:151)
2. Prohibition of adultery - “And do not commit adultery for, behold, it is an abomination and an evil way [emphasis added].” (The Qur’an, 17:32)
3. Obligation to fast during Ramadan - “O you who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you [emphasis added] as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God.” (The Qur’an, 2:183)
4. Obligation to fulfill promise and contractual agreement - “O you who have attained to faith! Be true to your covenants [emphasis added]!….” (The Qur’an, 5:1)

All Muslim scholars – Sunni or Shiite – agree with the abovementioned theological positions as they are derived from unambiguous verses. Thus, they are definitive in meaning.

**Ijma’**

Some Muslim scholars consider theological positions based on *ijma`* (consensus) as definitive truth. However, this assertion faces some contention.

*Ijma`* is popularly defined by Muslim scholars as a consensus of all *mujtahids* (Muslim scholars who are qualified to perform *ijtihad* in religious issues) of a certain period on religious issues. It is recognised by Muslim scholars as one of the primary sources of Islamic ruling in the following order:

1. the Qur’an
2. the Prophet’s *hadith*
3. *Ijma`*
4. *Qiyas* (analogy)

One could find agreements among Muslim scholars from various theological schools on the following religious issues:

1. Belief in one God,
2. The Qur’an is God’s revelation to Muhammad,
3. Muhammad is the Prophet of God

However, these consensuses occurred only with the presence of definitive scriptural evidences that are uncontested and in matters of *al-ma`lum bi al-din bi al-darurah* (what is necessarily known to be part of the religion). *Ijma`*, in this regard, occurs dependent on definitive scriptural evidence.

There are many problems with regards to *ijma`* at conceptual and practical level when there is no definitive scriptural evidence and in matters other than *al-ma`lum bi al-din bi al-darurah*. For example, what characteristics qualify one as a *mujtahid*? Who are the *mujtahids* of a particular time who must agree for *ijma’* to occur? How do we identify them? Most importantly, will it ever be practically possible for an agreement to be reached by every single *mujtahid* spread across the world?

Due to opposing views and concerns, Muslim scholars have always taken a cautious and prudent approach when dealing with claim of *ijma`* on any theological issues. They would apply skepticism first and investigate the claim thoroughly before accepting it. Often times, Muslim scholars would find the claim invalid or the meaning of the *ijma`* was not as per the standard definition. Instead, the ijma’ was particular to a school of jurisprudence or locality. As such, *ijma`* is not included here as determiner of definitive truth.

**Quantitative assessment**

Traditional Muslim scholars are in agreement that definitive truth is quantitatively very much less than subjective truth. The reason is that the nature of the Qur’an itself allows for various interpretations to most of its verses. The flexibility of meanings inherent in Qur’anic verses serve different needs and situations to fulfil Islam’s primary function as the religion of all peoples, time and places. The subjective truths are further explained by the fact that the Arabic language as finite thus it can never capture the infinity of Allah’s knowledge (18:109 and 31:27) embedded in the Qur’an. It would take more than literal understanding and countless interpretations to unpack Allah’s infinite knowledge and wisdom in most of the Qura’nic verses.

**Implication of understanding**

If the above understanding of truth in Islam is accepted, than a Muslims must also accept some important implications of such understanding.

Firstly, truth in Islam follows a hierarchy and that objective truth is of higher hierarchy than subjective truth, despite being quantitatively less. This would mean Muslims must know the type of truth that he is holding to in order to know its strength and hierarchy when facing differing viewpoints. *Thus, unless a truth has been ascertained with necessary evidences, one must not assume that the truth that he believes is the absolute truth that cannot be challenged.*

Secondly, most theological issues would have many viewpoints and interpretations. Also, there could be many truths in contentious issues. Thus, it is not necessary for Muslims to hold rigidly to one viewpoint all the time or in all contexts and regard a differing viewpoint as deviant or heretical. When it is confirmed in the Islamic intellectual tradition that there are many viewpoints on an issue from various many credible scholars*, a Muslim must then practise respect and tolerance and be open to other differing views.*

Thirdly, prudence in seeking truth is to perceive all claims of truth as subjective first, since it is quantitatively much more, until proven otherwise. This would also mean that there could always be other viewpoints that are equally valid.

Ultimately, Islam is a religion of moderation in worship, in obedience, in rulings and in every commandment. It calls for objectivity and balance in words, actions, looks, behaviour and all other states. Allah says, “Thus We have made you a middle nation, so that you may act as witnesses for mankind, and the Messenger may be a witness for you…” ( 2:143).

Extracted and adapted from

<https://wasatonline.wordpress.com/2016/04/01/wasatiyah-approach-to-understanding-truth-edition-no-8april-2016/> and

<http://eng.dar-alifta.org/foreign/ViewArticle.aspx?ID=364&text=moderation>