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3. *“If a Muslim male does not shake the hand of a female, the non-Muslims will think this demeans women, so let’s take the easy way and shake hands with the opposite sex.”* This statement is a negligent approach that falls short of the middle path. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *“I do not shake the hands of women”* (Reported by Ibn Mājah). And ‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها), the wife of the Messenger (ﷺ), stated, *“By Allāh, the hand of Allāh’s Messenger never touched another woman [other than his wives]. He used to take the pledge of allegiance of women verbally only.”* Shaking hands with the opposite sex is a means to temptation that may eventually lead to fornication. However, there is no harm in exchanging greetings without shaking hands, as long as alluring speech is avoided. And there is no harm in women shaking hands with immediate relatives such as their fathers, husbands and brothers. The Prophet was never disrespectful towards his female disciples, yet he never shook their hands. So this is a respectful act towards women. Most non-Muslims are very understanding once this matter is explained to them, so more Muslims should make an effort in explaining this affair rather than giving in and thereby opposing the Prophetic texts and falling short. In truth, a Muslim can be a responsible member of the community, without compromising the obligations of his religion and without breaking the laws of the host country. Indeed, good, upright practising Muslims become role models of good character in communities.

Modernists deliver verdicts claiming that the religion allows for this ease wherein Allāh is disobeyed. If it was the case that the Messenger (ﷺ) gave license to his Companions to disobey the clear commands of the Qur’ān and Prophetic Sunnah, then we would find clear examples from the Companions themselves opposing the commands contained in the texts, yet no such narrations are found in the huge body of Ḥadīth literature. We never find, for example, the Companions shaving their beards, or the women removing their hijābs, or men shaking hands with women and other than that! The textual

proofs related to ease revolve around concessions that are established also by textual evidences. For example: It is stated in the text that if one is not able to pray standing due to illness or difficulty, then he prays whilst seated. If he is not able to do that, then he prays lying down. If one has no water nearby, or has an illness that prevents him from utilising water to make ablution (wuḍū’) for prayer or take a bath after sexual intercourse, then he is given the allowance to make a dry purification (tayammum) by simply striking the earth, wiping the hands and face. When one is upon a journey, then he shortens his prayer from four to two units, and he may combine between some of the prayers, and he may break his fast if he wishes, even if it is in the month of Ramaḍān, and so on. So these are just some examples of concessions and the removal of hardship contained within the wise, divine legislation.

You can see clearly that the legislated ease does not entail disobedience to Allāh. In these times, we find those who claim to represent the ‘moderate Islamic viewpoint’, yet in truth, they oppose the Islamic texts and speak about the religion ignorantly, and from the most ignorant of their statements is, *“We do not find this ruling in the Qur’ān; therefore, we are not obligated with it,”* whilst it is established that the Islamic legislation is taken from the Qur’ān, the Prophetic tradition and the consensus of the Companions. The danger with these viewpoints is that small sections of Muslim communities fall prey to the extremists as a backlash to these ‘new age’ modernist thinkers who are negligent in implementation of the Islamic legislation. So on the other side of the spectrum we have the extremists who lurk in the shadows, waiting for their prey. They indoctrinate the youth with false ideologies that call to violence and false notions of ‘jihād’. So they encourage with suicide attacks and terrorist acts, all of which are forbidden by the Qur’ān and the pure Prophetic Sunnah.

So in summary, the middle path lies in adhering to the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Sunnah upon the understanding of the Companions.

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ISLĀM BETWEEN EXTREMISM & NEGLECT

Allāh, the Most High, stated,
“Allāh wishes for you ease and He does not wish for you hardship.”

(Qur’ān 2:185)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said,
“Give good tidings and do not cause the people to flee, and make things easy and do not make things difficult.”

(Reported by Muslim)



MODERATION IN ISLĀM

In recent times, many people who call to Islām have started discussing the matter of moderation and extremism in Islām. Unfortunately, many of these discussions are driven by political agendas on both sides of the dividing line; that is to say, you have on one side those Muslims who, in their desire to be seen as integrating with the host community, will label as extremist that which they see as alien to the society they are living in. An example of this is the huge debate that erupted in 2006 in the UK regarding the wearing of the face veil (or niqāb) by Muslim women. If one studies the issue of the face veil Islamically, outside of the prevalent political and cultural agendas, one would find that the face veil is, at the very least, recommended by the Islamic legislation, and it cannot be labelled as extreme. Yet others may even regard the growing of the beard as extreme, or praying five times a day as extreme. All of these judgements are based upon modern-day prevalent culture and not upon study of the Qur’ān or Prophetic tradition. On the other side of the dividing line, we have the extremists who will go beyond the limits of the Islamic legislation, again, driven by either cultural or political agendas, so they may take the lives of individuals by murder and terrorism and attribute that to Islām and even claim that Islām legislates such despicable acts. Those who carried out the 7 July 2005 subway and bus bombings in London claimed they were guided by Islām. But in reality, they were deceived by an extremist political methodology, far removed from Islām. Other extremists may partake in what is commonly labelled in these times as ‘honour killings’ of female members of their families, or force their daughters into marriage with one whom they do not wish to marry, and then they attribute this to Islām! Nothing could be further from the truth. This article will discuss the Islamic concept of taking the balanced and middle path in the religion.

So the middle and balanced way in Islām is that a person does not transgress the limits set by Allāh, and likewise, he does not fall short with regard to them. And this moderate and balanced way lies in adherence to the example of the life of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), not going to extremes beyond following him and not falling short in following him. An example of that would be if a man was to say, “*I wish to stand and pray throughout every night and not sleep because prayer is the best of worship so I love to stay awake praying continually.*” Then this is extremism in the religion that opposes the truth. Something similar to this occurred in the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), when three men came together and said, “*I will pray through the night and not sleep,*” another one said, “*I will continually fast and not break the fast,*” and a third said, “*I will not get married.*” So the news of this discussion reached Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ), so he said, “**What is wrong with some of you that you say such things?! I fast and I break my fast; I stand in prayer a portion of the night and I also sleep; and I marry women. So whoever opposes my way [the Sunnah] then he is not from me**” (Reported by *al-Bukhārī*). So these people went to an extreme in the religion, so the Prophet (ﷺ) reprimanded them and corrected them, because they opposed his Sunnah (i.e. his way).

As for falling short, then it is if a person was to say, “*I am not in need of fulfilling the obligations that Allāh and his Messenger have placed upon me,*” or he states, “*I am not in need of carrying out supererogatory acts of worship.*”

This negligence is in opposition to the balanced middle way of Islām and the Prophetic methodology. As for the middle, moderate and balanced path, then that is to proceed upon the way of Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) and the way of his noble Companions.

Another example that can be mentioned here is of three men and in front of them is an open sinner. So the first states, “*As for me, I will not greet this open sinner with the salutation of peace (i.e. the salām). I will boycott him and be distant from him and not talk to him at all!*” The second states, “*As for me, I will accompany this sinner and give him the salām, and I will display my pleasure and happiness in front of him, and I will invite him and accept his invitations, and I hold him to be a pious man.*” The third man states, “*This man is a sinner, and I dislike him due to his sin, and I love him due to the īmān [faith] he has. I will not boycott or abandon him unless I see that it will rectify him. If my boycotting him will not bring about his rectification, but rather I see that it will increase him in sin, then I will not abandon him.*” So we say that the first man has gone beyond bounds and fallen into extremism, and the second man has fallen short and become negligent. As for the third, then he is one who is balanced.

“So whoever opposes my way [the Sunnah] then he is not from me” (Reported by *al-Bukhārī*)

So this is what we say regarding all the acts of worship, as well as worldly dealings and social interactions, that people are either extreme or negligent or balanced.

Yet another example is of a man who is married, so he is subservient to his wife and goes whichever way she directs him. He does not correct her when she sins, and he does not ever encourage her with goodness and excellent behaviour. Rather, she possesses his decision making, and she has authority over him. And on the other extreme, there is a man who is overburdening and arrogant, and he has no concern for his wife or her feelings; he demeans her and treats her worse than an oppressed slave. The third man is balanced and moderate with regard to his wife, just as Allāh has commanded him, “**And the women have rights over their husbands similar to those of their husbands over them in that which is good**” (Qur’ān, 2:228). The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, “**Let not a believing man hate a believing woman. If he dislikes one quality in her, then he will be pleased with another**” (Reported by *Imām Muslim*). So we see that the first one is negligent, the second is extreme and the third is in line with the wise legislation: moderate and balanced.

From all of these examples we see that moderation and balance is decided by the teachings of the Qur’ān and Prophetic Sunnah. As Muslims, we are obligated to believe that the legislation of the Qur’ān and Sunnah are just and balanced, as Allāh, the Most High, has stated, “**Allāh bears witness that none has the right to be worshipped except He, and the angels and those with knowledge also bear witness. And He is established with justice; none has the right to be worshipped except Him, the All-Mighty, All-Wise**” (Qur’ān, 3:18). However, those who misunderstand the texts due to their ignorance, or misinterpret them due to their deviated desires, they are the ones who fall into negligence or extremism.

We find modernist Muslim ‘thinkers’ and authors who claim to be re-interpreting Islām for the ‘modern age’, stating that Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) used to encourage the people with ease and taking the paths of ease, and they quote as a proof, his (ﷺ) statement, “**Give good tidings and do not cause the people to flee, and make things easy and do not make things difficult**” (Reported by *Muslim*). And the statement of Allāh, “**Allāh wishes for you ease, and He does not wish for you hardship**” (Qur’ān, 2:185). So they utilise the likes of these texts to justify their own shortcomings. Some modernists even claim that if a religious act is not found in the Qur’ān, then we are not obligated to act upon it. This saying of theirs is a clear violation of Qur’anic text.

Let us bring here several more examples to show the middle path between extremism and negligence:

1. “***The beard of the Muslim male causes the people to feel intimidated, so one should remove it or trim it down.***” Then this statement displays negligence in enacting the commandment of the Prophet (ﷺ) in which he said, “**My Lord has commanded me to grow my beard and trim my moustache**” (Reported by *al-Tabarī*). He also commanded the believers, “**Trim the moustache and grow the beard**” (*al-Bukhārī* and *Muslim*). Growing the beard is from the natural disposition of a male and a distinguishing sign of a Muslim, as has been stated in other narrations. To oppose this command is a sinful action. So the middle way is to grow the beard, and negligence is to shave it or trim it.

2. “***The face veil and outer cloak worn by the Muslim female is intimidating and unnecessary, so women should not wear it.***” This is another statement that falls short of the balanced legislation. As for the outer cloak or jilbāb, then the female has been commanded with it in the Qur’ān, where Allāh states, “**O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments [jilbābs] around the whole of their bodies. That will be better, so they are known [as free respectable women] so as not to be annoyed**” (Qur’ān, 33:59). So the outer garment has been commanded by Allāh; therefore, it is not permissible to disobey Him due to prevalent culture or tribal traditions or in the name of integration! As for the face veil, then at the very least, it is recommended by the legislation. It was stated by ‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها), the wife of the Prophet (ﷺ), that when one of the Companions approached her, “**I covered my face from him with my garment**” (Reported by *al-Bukhārī*). She also stated that whilst on Ḥajj, when male riders would pass by, she “**would drop the garment from her head over her face**” (Reported by *Abū Dāwūd*). And similarly, it has been related by the sister-in-law of the Prophet, Asmā’ (رضي الله عنها), that during the Ḥajj “**We used to cover our faces from the men**” (Reported by *al-Ḥākim*). So it is strange that we find Muslim community leaders claiming that there is no mention of the niqāb (face veil) in the Qur’ān, and therefore, it is not from Islām, but merely an old desert-Arab tradition! Whereas, we find from the above narrations that the face veil was the practice of the believing women. So those Muslims who reject the legitimacy of the face veil have fallen into neglect of the religious texts, and are not to be considered as balanced, but instead we say they are negligent. What is even worse is that they call to these ignorant views.