

Chapter Twelve

MODERATION AND AVOIDING EXTREMES IN ISLAM

Muslims are ordered in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah to be moderate in the way they live their life and to avoid extremes. They are requested to do what they are capable of doing realizing that as human beings we have limitations and shortcomings. God accepts what we do when our deeds are good and offered with sincerity and devotion, even if little. We should make life easy and not difficult for others.

We will discuss the following concepts:

- 1- Muslims are ordered to be moderate and to avoid extremes, even in rituals of worship
- 2- Muslims are told to do what they are capable of, for God accepts our efforts
- 3- We should make life easy and not difficult for others
- 4- Why some people follow extreme views or positions? and what can be done to fight extremists?

Muslims are ordered to be moderate in the way they live and avoid extremes

It is natural to follow a moderate way of life and avoid extremes. Islam understands and respects human nature, therefore it does not ask Muslims to do more than what they are capable of doing.

Anas (one of the Prophet's companions) related the story of the three men who asked the prophet's wives about his worship. One of them vowed to pray all night and not sleep. The second man vowed to fast every day (optional fasting). The third man vowed to remain celibate and not marry. When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) heard of what they intended to do he said: (By Allah among you I fear Allah the most and I know Him the best, yet I pray at night but not all night, for I sleep part of the night; and I fast but not every day; and I marry women. Therefore, anyone who does not wish to follow my way, he is not one of us) narrated by Bokhari & Muslim.

We learn from the Prophet's sayings that moderation is the tradition of the prophet and is what Muslims should follow. Prayer at night when others are asleep indicates our devotion to Allah, but should not be excessive that we pray all night, for we cannot do that worship for long. And if we do that we will get tired and we may fall asleep and miss our dawn prayer. Also we will be tired the next morning and unable to do our work. Similarly, fasting is an act of worship to God as we try to come close to Him and increase our piety and devotion. But we cannot fast every day of our life. It will harm our health and make us sick and weak. Also not marrying and having a family is against human nature and defeats the idea of a Muslim community based on cooperation between families, and having children who are the future and will carry on our work after we are gone. So the Prophet teaches us moderation in everything that we do in our life. The exercise of moderation then indicates belief in God and indicates that we understand our accountability to Him. In contrast, those who follow extremes have no real faith or proper understanding of what Islam is about. Islam is not praying all night or fasting every day. Islam is doing our work to the best of our ability and reaching out to help others who need our help and not just rituals of worship.

The Qur'an describes Muslims as a nation that is justly balanced and just, avoiding extremes:

﴿ وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ

شَهِيدًا ﴿ [البقرة: ١٤٣]

Thus have We made of you an Ummat justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves;

Al-Baqara 2 : 143

When Muslims spend, they are requested to be moderate and not be misers or extravagant:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا ۖ ﴾

[الفرقان: ٦٧]

Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes);

Al-Furqan 25 : 67

﴿ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا

مَحْسُورًا ۗ ﴾ [الإسراء: ٢٩]

Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute.

Al-Isra'a 17 : 29

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us to avoid extremes in worship and not pray all night or fast every day, because we have other obligations to fulfill. We have work to do, and we have a family to look after and we have our health to worry about. Abdullah Bin Amru Bin Al'As said: Allah's messenger (PBUH) asked me: (I hear that you pray all night and that you fast by day). I said: Yes O messenger of Allah. He said: (Do not do that, fast but not every day; pray at night but not all night long. For your body has rights over you; and your eyes have rights over you; and your wife has rights over you; and your visitor has rights over you. It is enough to fast three days each month, for a good deed is rewarded ten times, thus you are considered as if you have fasted all the time)

Narrated by Bokhari & Muslim

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warned us of the dangers of being extreme. He said:

(Avoid extremes in your religion: those before you perished because they were extremists)

Narrated by Nesa'ee, Ibn Majja & Ahmad

He also said:

(Those who are extreme and too strict in their words and deeds will fail and perish)

Narrated by Muslim

Allah accepts our deeds even if little

Allah accepts our good deeds when done with sincerity and good intention, even if little. We differ in our abilities and God knows what we are capable of doing and achieving. The Qur'an tells us that Allah does not place a burden on a soul more than it can bear:

﴿ وَلَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۗ وَلَدَيْنَا مَكْتَبٌ بِالنَّاطِقِ ۗ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

[المؤمنون: ٦٢]

On no soul do We place a burden greater than it can bear: before Us is a record which clearly shows the Truth: They will never be wronged.

Al-Mumenoun 23 : 62

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that Allah accepts our deeds when done on a regular basis, day in and day out, even if little:

Aesha (the Prophet's wife) related that the Prophet was asked: What are the deeds most beloved to Allah? He said: (The deeds most beloved to Allah are the deeds that are done on a regular and constant basis, even if little). Then he said: (Do what you are capable of doing)

Narrated by Bokhari & Muslim.

To pray two Rak'a every night on a regular basis is more beloved to God than praying all night long one day, then skipping our prayers the following day because we were tired and could not do it. It is consistency that matters not how much we pray. Similarly, giving charity on a regular basis and teaching our children the importance of charity is more important, even if we give a little, than giving a large sum of money one year then withholding our charity for years to come. Helping someone who needs our help on a regular basis is more important than showering him with money or gifts at one time, then stopping after that.

The implication of this Hadeeth also is that we should not ask people to do more than what they are capable of and to accept and be happy with their effort. When we show people that we appreciate their service and not belittle their effort it reflects on their behavior, for they are more likely to continue their good work. In contrast, when we look down at their charity we may influence them in a negative way and they may stop altogether. The Qur'an warns against belittling the effort of other people:

﴿ الَّذِينَ يَلْمُزُونَ الْمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَالَّذِينَ لَا
يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا جُهْدَهُمْ فَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنْهُمْ سَخِرَ اللَّهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴾

[التوبة: ٧٩]

Those who slander such of the Believers as give themselves; freely to (deeds of) charity, as well as such as can find nothing to give except the fruits of their labour, and throw ridicule on them, Allah will throw back their ridicule on them: and they shall have a grievous penalty.

At-Tawba 9 : 79

The Prophet (PBUH) also emphasized that our deeds, along with our prayers and sincere intentions will be accepted by Allah who will shower us with His mercy:

(None of you his deeds alone will save him). He was asked: Not even you O messenger of Allah? He said: (Not even I unless Allah's mercy encompasses me. Therefore do what is right, and what you are capable of, and seek help in prayers, and be sincere in your intentions)

Narrated by Bokhari.

Make life easy and not difficult

The Qur'an explains that Allah intends every facility for us and does not want to put us to difficulty:

﴿ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ ﴾ [البقرة: ١٨٥]

Allah intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties

Al-Baqara 2 : 185

When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sent his envoys to Yemen his advice to them was :

(Give glad tidings, and do not make others hate you or run away from you; make things easy and not difficult)

Narrated by Bokhari & Muslim

The Prophet (PBUH) also explained that Islam is a religion of ease and not restrictions, and that we should not make it difficult on others:

(This religion is one of ease and not restrictions; no one should try to make it strict or difficult on others, for the religion will overcome his effort. Therefore, do what is right, and what you are capable of, and be happy, and seek help in prayer)

Narrated by Bokhari.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) showed us through his behavior that we too should follow the easy way and not the hard way as long as both choices are allowed. Aesha said: Whenever Allah's messenger (PBUH) was given a choice between two actions, both lawful, he always chose the easy one, as long as it is not sinful. If there is any sin in it he would be farthest away from it. Allah's messenger never sought revenge for himself in anything unless Allah's orders were violated, then he would seek revenge for Allah (narrated by Bokhari & Muslim).

Why some become extremists?

There are many reasons why some people take extreme positions and become radicals in their way of thinking. Some may even go further and consider any point of view not like their own as wrong, and that only those who hold their views are guided and true believers. To them this feeling gives them the right to act and some may resort to violence to assert their convictions. This may lead to terrorism and murder as a way of expressing their views. Such extreme or radical behavior is not limited to Muslims, but is seen among Christian and Jewish extremists as well as among Hindus and even atheists.

Lack of proper knowledge and understanding is obviously the main reason for extreme or terrorist behavior. Religious teachings if divinely inspired never advocates violence, murder or spreading fear as a way of expressing one's beliefs. Lack of freedom and the inability to express one's views and autocratic rule in many Muslim countries and oppression drives these radical movements underground, where their teachings become more radical and their ideology is not challenged and contrasted to proper understanding of the religion. This radical ideology and behavior then festers and becomes more polarized as it assumes political and social tones. Poverty and unemployment and the absence of any hope in the future are an inducement in the recruitment of young vulnerable souls that become instruments of terror as they obey their masters and guardians.

Putting radicals and terrorists in jail and executing their leaders does not solve the underlying problems that foster and promote terrorism. If we kill a leader, ten like him will emerge to take his place. The only way to combat wrong ideology and wrong behavior is by contrasting its teachings to the truth, and proving the fallacy of their convictions and behavior. Also correcting the social ills and allowing for democracy and freedom of expression cuts off the ability of radicals to recruit others to their cause.

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