

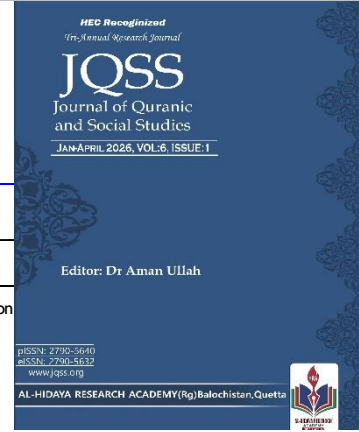
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Islamic Social System and the Clash of Civilizations: Revisiting the Islamic Social Framework in the Light of the Holy Prophet's Teachings

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Abstract and



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Wasatiyyah and I'tidāl: The Quranic Paradigm of Moderation as an Ethical Response to Isrāf and Consumer Excess

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Abstract

This study explores the Islamic principle of moderation (Wasatiyyah and I'tidāl) as a comprehensive ethical framework governing personal conduct, economic behavior, and social justice. Rooted in the Quranic description of the Muslim community as an “Ummatan wasatan” (a justly balanced nation), moderation in Islam is not merely a moral recommendation but a divine command. It establishes equilibrium between two extremes; extravagance (isrāf) and miserliness, asceticism and indulgence, rigidity and leniency ensuring harmony between material life and spiritual accountability. This paper analyzes the linguistic and theological foundations of Wasatiyyah, drawing from classical exegesis and scholarly interpretations that associate it with justice (‘adl), balance (tawāzun), and excellence (Iḥsān). It further examines the application of moderation in consumer behavior, introducing the concept of Wasatiyyah-consumerism as a model of responsible consumption grounded in need, accountability, and sustainability. In contrast to modern consumer culture characterized by excess and material competition, Islamic teachings advocate mindful utilization of resources, equitable circulation of wealth, and environmental responsibility. By contrasting isrāf with i'tidāl, the study highlights how extravagance leads to social imbalance, spiritual heedlessness, and economic injustice, whereas moderation fosters fairness, gratitude, and communal welfare. The Prophetic model exemplifies this balance through simplicity, ethical restraint, and social responsibility. Ultimately, the research argues that moderation is foundational to achieving justice and sustainability in both individual and collective life. The Qur'ānic paradigm of balance thus offers a timeless and holistic response to contemporary challenges of overconsumption, inequality, and moral decline, positioning moderation as a pathway to spiritual success and societal harmony.

Keywords: Wasatiyyah, isrāf, Quran, Gratitude, Welfare, Comprehensive

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Introduction

Islam discourages extremism and emphasizes balance and moderation in life. It promotes a justly balanced society, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Moderation is key in all aspects, including spending, where one should strike a balance between extravagance and stinginess. Excess is prohibited, and adhering to God's limits is essential. By observing the law and avoiding doubtful matters, Muslims can maintain a harmonious balance between body and soul, denouncing both squandering and hoarding, and embracing moderation, as reflected in the Qur'anic declaration that Muslims are made into a "justly-balanced" community to serve as a model for humanity.

Unlike Aristotle's concept of the "Golden Mean," which is a flexible rule subject to situational reasoning, the Islamic principle of moderation is a divine command embedded in law, obligatory and universally applicable. Islam neither endorses extreme asceticism nor unchecked indulgence, but instead advocates for a harmonious development of body and soul. It denounces both squandering and hoarding, prohibits usury, and commands its followers to uphold justice, avoid doubtful matters, and live a life governed by clearly defined lawful limits.¹

Wasatiyyah (Moderation), is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and represents an ideal state of balance that upholds justice, righteousness, and wisdom. It carries significant theological, ethical, and legal implications, ensuring fairness in judgment, honesty in dealings, and righteousness in relationships.²

Wasatiyyah establishes a balanced framework that harmonizes material and spiritual life, prohibiting both excess and negligence while safeguarding justice and moral discipline. Through clearly defined lawful limits, wasatiyyah cultivates accountability, social equity, and ethical integrity in personal and collective spheres.

Concept of Wasatiyyah

The term Wasatiyyah is originated from the Arabic root word *wasat*, which signifies balance, moderation, fairness, and the middle course. It originates from the phrase "Ummatan Wasatan", where Allah describes the Muslim community as a balanced or just nation.³ This highlights the significance of following a balanced and moderate approach in religious beliefs and practices, steering clear of all forms of extremism.

The concept of Ummatan Wasatan serves as a vital reminder of Islam's true essence. It encourages Muslims to adopt a path that avoids excessive rigidity or harshness, promoting moderation that aligns with the core values of the faith.⁴

Wasatiyyah is representing a middle position, fairness, and a just alternative. It is embodying excellence, nobility, and perfection. The term wasatiyyah can further be understood as a state of balance or moderation situated between two extremes. Haniff identified these extremes as excessive rigidity and extreme leniency.⁵ Moderation is giving everything its due place or right, aligning it closely with the principle of justice. It is assigning things their appropriate status and maintaining equilibrium between opposing ends. In the context of economics, consumerism is considered the concluding phase that follows production and distribution.

Classic and modern readings demonstrate wasatiyyah as a fair and balanced center route that prevents both rigor and excessive leniency, so guaranteeing every topic has its proper place. Reflects moral perfection and balance, precisely related with the larger concept of justice in thought, action, and social organization.

The Principle of Wasatiyyah in Consumerism

The term Wasatiyyah-consumerism represents an integration of two concepts consumerism and wasatiyyah. Literally, consumerism refers to using possessions, while in broader terms, it involves utilizing products and services to fulfill necessities. While the term may be relatively new, the concept is firmly rooted in Islamic teachings and was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Moffat described consumerism as the process through which goods and services are consumed to satisfy human wants, continuing until their intended function is achieved.⁶ Similarly, (2002) and Surtahman (1993), explain consumerism as the behavior of individuals engaging in the acquirement, use, maintenance, or disposal of goods and services, whether for personal use, preservation, storage, or final disposal.⁷

Wasatiyyah-consumerism therefore frames consumption within ethical limits, ensuring that the fulfillment of needs does not lead to excess or moral negligence. It promotes responsible acquisition and use of resources in alignment with Islamic values of moderation, accountability, and social welfare.

In Arabic, the term *istihlak* refers to consumerism and is referred as *itlaf al-'ayn*, which means the consumption of the physical form or utility of a product. This concept denotes that a product is used to achieve certain benefits like water being consumed for drinking or used in irrigation. Although its physical form may cease to exist, its purpose is fulfilled through the advantages it provides, like sustaining life or supporting agriculture. Thus, the act of consumption (*istihlak*) is meaningful because it results in benefit, even if the item itself is no longer intact. The notion of wasatiyyah, closely associated with moderation, is rooted in choosing a balanced and middle-ground approach in thoughts, attitudes, and actions. It emphasizes avoiding the extremes on either side. Moderation, ease, and balance are ethical values in Islam and are considered foundational traits of Islamic law.⁸

Thus, wasatiyyah-consumerism describes a model of consumption rooted in need, responsibility, and balance. It promotes mindful use of resources, discourages waste, and aligns economic behavior with ethical values. Wasatiyyah, or moderation, challenges the excesses of consumerism by promoting a balanced approach to consumption. By embracing moderation, individuals can reduce waste, mitigate the environmental impact of overconsumption, and focus on what truly adds value to their lives. This approach fosters a more mindful and sustainable relationship with material goods, contributing to a more equitable society.⁹

Complementing this concept, Wasatiyyah encourages avoiding excess and adopting a middle-ground approach in all actions. By embracing moderation, individuals can cultivate sustainable consumption habits, reduce environmental impact, and focus on

what truly enhances well-being, thereby fostering a balanced and equitable relationship with material goods.

Concept of Al-‘Adl (Justice)

The imperative form ta‘dil (تعديل) in Arabic the meaning of establishing justice or offering restitution. The form li‘adila (لعلل) implies the purpose to uphold justice, while ya‘dilūna (يعدلون), in the third-person masculine plural, signifies the act of adapting equality, retaining justice, or attributing parity. In Islamic teachings, the core principles of moderation include justice (‘adālah), balance (tawāzun), and tolerance (tasāmuḥ). The term al-‘adl, denotes justice is interpreted in various classical tafāsīr. For example, al-Ṭabarī explains al-‘adl as a divine command given to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to implement and spread fairness, mainly in the form of al-inṣāf equity or neutrality. Furthermore, al-‘adl is also associated with the central Islamic testimony, i.e., affirming that there is no deity except Allah. In Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, al-‘adl is understood as worshipping Allah with justice, characterized by fairness and moderation al-qisṭ wa al-muwāzanah. Similarly, the Tafsīr al-Jalālayn interprets al-‘adl as referring both to tawḥīd (the oneness of God) and al-inṣāf (justice or fairness). According to al-Māwardī, the concept of al-‘adl covers three main extents tawḥīd, or bearing witness that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah, performing actions in accordance to fairness, maintaining equality and sincerity in carrying out righteous deeds, as acts of devotion or moral conduct, in both internal (spiritual) and external (physical) forms. | 0

Ethically, justice requires moderation and balance in character. It lies between extremes such as oppression and weakness, extravagance and miserliness, harshness and negligence. This balance links *al-‘Adl* with *wasatiyyah* and *i‘tidāl*. A just individual maintains fairness not only in public actions but also in private intentions. Ultimately, *al-‘Adl* represents a holistic framework that integrates belief, law, and morality. It establishes equilibrium within the self and society, ensuring that human conduct reflects divine wisdom and fairness. Through justice, Islam seeks to cultivate a community rooted in accountability, integrity, and social responsibility.

Importance of I’tidal

The term I’tidal (اعتدال) in Arabic signifies balance, moderation, and uprightness, deriving from the root ‘A-d-l (عدل), means justice and fairness. The root ‘Adl (عدل) and its various forms in Arabic convey meanings related to justice, fairness, equity, and proportionality. It signifies acting and dealing justly, establishing justice, maintaining fairness, and ensuring balance. The term ‘Adl (عَدْلٌ) encompasses justice, equity, accuracy, recompense, ransom, and compensation. ‘Adala (عدل) in its perfect third-person singular form refers to being proportioned or endowed with great natural faculties. The command Ta‘dilū (تععدلو) in the second-person plural imperative instructs people to act justly, while Idilū (أدلو) reinforces the command to uphold justice. | 1 As seen in: “Among

the followers of Prophet Moses, there existed a group who led others with truth and upheld justice in accordance with its principles”¹²

The root ‘Adl (عدل) and its derivatives appear approximately 28 times in the Holy Qur’an, emphasizing the significance of justice and fairness in Islamic teachings. Shall we remove the advice away from you because you are a transgressing people?¹³ The meaning is that We will not give up advising you through the Qur’an, no matter how rebellious and disobedient you may become. This tells us that the person who is engaged in preaching and inviting others towards Islam should carry the message to everybody; he must not give up preaching to some people or any group simply because they are non-believers, highly irreligious, sinners and transgressors. In Qur’anic’ usage, ‘Adl embodies equity and balance in personal conduct and societal affairs, ensuring impartiality and righteousness. ¹⁴

In essence, ‘Adl embodies equity, righteousness, and balance, guiding both ethical behavior and the moral responsibilities of individuals within society.

I’tidāl as a Foundation for Justice and Equity

In Quran, ‘Adl is associated with Allah’s divine justice and the human obligation to act justly in every sphere of life. Quran describes Muslim ummah as a "middle nation" (ummah wasat), signifying a balanced and just community that avoids both excess and deficiency by following Allah’s commands as directed:

“Thus, We have made you a fair and balanced nation, that you may bear witness over all people, and the Messenger will be a witness over you. The former direction of prayer was appointed only to test who would remain loyal to the Messenger and who would turn away. It was certainly a difficult trial—except for those whom Allah has rightly guided. And Allah will never let your faith be in vain. Indeed, Allah is most compassionate and merciful toward mankind.”¹⁵

Emphasizing a balanced and just community that avoids both excess and deficiency. Similarly, Quran states:

"Certainly, Allah directs us to practice justice (‘Adl), excellence (Ihsān), and care for our relatives and forbids committing immorality, wrongdoing or crossing limits."¹⁶

In this context, I’tidāl is to maintain a just and moderate approach, avoiding both excessiveness (ifrāt) and negligence (tafrīt).¹⁷ Linguistically, wasatiyyah refers to justice (al-‘adl) and (al-faḍl), excellence (al-khairiyyah), and balance (al-bainiyyah). Al-Qaradawi defined Wasatiyyah as a balance that neither favors one extreme nor suppresses the other, ensuring that neither side takes more than it deserves. ¹⁸ Beyond legal and theological realms, moderation extends to personal conduct, social interactions, and governance. Ethical moderation (i’tidāl fi al-akhlaq) involves humility without self-deprecation, generosity without extravagance, and courage without recklessness. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) embodied moderation, promoting devotion without hardship or complacency. Wahbah Al-Zuhayli highlights wasatiyyah as balance (i’tidāl) in faith, ethics, and governance, countering extremism and moral decline. Moderation, therefore,

is not a passive compromise but an active pursuit of equilibrium, ensuring harmony between divine commands and human well-being.¹⁹

Contrasting *Isrāf* and *I'tidāl*

Isrāf and *I'tidāl* (moderation) represent two contrasting principles in Islamic teachings. *Isrāf* refers to excessive consumption, spending, or behavior beyond necessity, leading to wastefulness and moral corruption, whereas *I'tidāl* ensures balance and ethical use of resources.

Isrāf is explicitly condemned as harmful behaviour that violates the normative guidelines set by the Qur'ān and Sunnah, including spending wealth beyond what is reasonable and beneficial, even when the means and activities are lawful.

The Quran warns against *Isrāf* while encouraging moderation, as stated in Quran:

"They are the ones who, in their spending, avoid both excess and stinginess, maintaining a consistent path of moderation."²⁰

Islam discourages hoarding and unnecessary extravagance while promoting responsible spending. *I'tidāl* in financial matters ensures that wealth is used wisely and circulates fairly in society, whereas *Isrāf* leads to financial instability, social inequality, and economic harm. Scholars emphasize that spending excessively on luxuries or social status without benefit is condemned, while sustainable spending fosters economic justice and welfare.²¹

Excessive consumption (*Isrāf*) is identified as antithetical to Islamic ethical standards and is strongly discouraged within classical and modern jurisprudence.²² Moderation (*wasatiyyah*) in spending ensures that consumption fulfils human needs while avoiding both wastefulness (*Isrāf*) and stinginess, thus fostering economic justice and societal well-being. This responsible consumption framework emphasizes that ethical expenditure should be compatible with the higher objectives of Shari'ah, including the preservation of wealth (*hifẓ al-māl*) and the minimization of harm (*darar*).²³ *Isrāf* signals a departure from the moral imperative of measured and purposeful living, ultimately threatening both personal piety and communal welfare.

The principle of *I'tidāl* extends to responsible resource use, preventing harm to the environment. The Quran states, "And do not waste [resources] extravagantly; indeed, He does not like the wasters" (6:141), highlighting that *Isrāf* in natural resources, such as excessive water use and food wastage, contradicts Islamic values. The Prophet ﷺ said: "Do not waste water, even if you perform ablution on the banks of a flowing river."²⁴

I'tidāl, in contrast, supports sustainability, conservation, and mindful use of resources for the benefit of future generations. Islam also teaches that *Isrāf* weakens spiritual discipline by fostering indulgence in desires and leading to heedlessness of divine accountability. The Qur'an likens wasters to "brothers of the devils" (17:27), showing how extravagance distances a person from God-consciousness. *I'tidāl* nurtures self-restraint, humility, and gratitude, encouraging individuals to use their blessings wisely and purposefully.²⁵ Practicing *I'tidāl* in daily life requires conscious efforts to avoid *Isrāf*. This includes mindful spending, avoiding excessive luxury, reducing food wastage, conserving

energy, and prioritizing charity. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) exemplified I'tidāl through his simple lifestyle, even when he had access to wealth. By embracing moderation, individuals and societies can create a just, sustainable, and spiritually fulfilling life, free from the harms of extravagance.

Avoiding *isrāf* (extravagance) is integrally connected to the Islamic principle of moderation (*wasatiyyah*), which calls for balance between excess and deficiency in all aspects of life. Classical exegetes explain that the Qur'ānic command, “Eat and drink, but do not be excessive” (7:31), establishes a universal ethical rule: lawful enjoyment must remain within the bounds of moderation.²⁶ This balance reflects justice (‘adl) and gratitude, preventing both reckless consumption and miserliness. Similarly, the verse describing believers as those who are “neither extravagant nor miserly” (25:67) situates economic behavior within a divinely guided middle path.²⁷

Scholars of Islamic ethics have emphasized that *isrāf* represents a moral imbalance that contradicts the harmony Islam seeks to cultivate. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, in *Iḥyā' ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, discusses moderation in spending as part of spiritual discipline, arguing that excess hardens the heart and distances one from God-consciousness.³ Ibn Kathīr, in his Qur'ānic commentary, explains that extravagance entails spending beyond rightful limits, even in permissible matters.⁴ Contemporary scholarship further connects avoidance of *isrāf* with sustainable consumption and responsible stewardship, presenting moderation as a comprehensive ethical framework for personal and social life.⁵

The concept of *isrāf* extends beyond financial excess to include all forms of overindulgence and misuse, whether in food, wealth, time, or natural resources. The Qur'ān further cautions that wastefulness reflects moral and spiritual imbalance (17:27), thereby linking extravagance with ingratitude. From an Islamic perspective, material blessings are viewed as a trust (*amānah*), and their misuse signifies a failure to uphold this trust responsibly. Avoiding *isrāf*, therefore, becomes an expression of gratitude (*shukr*) and ethical stewardship (*khilāfah*).

The value of moderation and avoiding *isrāf* is evident from the instructions of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and the righteous predecessors. Hazrat Abu Hurairah (R.A) reported that three types of people will enter paradise without account: one who washes his only piece of cloth without having another to wear, one who does not own two pots for cooking, and one who does not seek variety in drinks. This highlights that those who avoid excess in food, drink, and clothing will be among the most fortunate in the Hereafter.

The practical example of Muhammad (ﷺ) reinforces this linkage between avoiding *isrāf* and embodying moderation. His warning against wasting water during ablution, even at a flowing river, illustrates that restraint applies universally—even in acts of worship.⁶ Thus, avoiding *isrāf* is not merely an economic guideline but a lived expression of *wasatiyyah*, ensuring equilibrium between material needs and spiritual integrity.

Hazrat Sufiyan preferred the company of the poor over the rich, and his wealthy disciples longed for the honor given to the less fortunate. A sage remarked that if people

feared Hell as much as they feared poverty and desired paradise as they desire wealth, they would attain both. Anas narrated that a representative of the needy came to the Prophet (ﷺ) expressing his concerns that the rich excelled in virtues through charity and pilgrimage, which the poor could not afford. The Prophet (ﷺ) assured him that the poor who remain patient will receive three great rewards: they will be granted a high place in paradise reserved for poor prophets, martyrs, and believers; they will enter paradise 500 years before the rich; and their simple acts of devotion will outweigh the charity of the wealthy. When the representative conveyed this message, the poor were content, demonstrating that true merit in divine service often lies with those who lead a life free from extravagance.²⁸

Conclusion

Following the discussion, the key conclusions are as follows:

1. Ensuring equilibrium between excess (ifrāt) and negligence (tafrīt), Islam establishes wasatiyyah (moderation) as a core principle governing belief, morals, economics, and social behavior.
2. A heavenly command based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah, avoiding israf (extravagance) connects material discipline with spiritual responsibility and thankfulness.
3. Concepts like al-'adl (justice) and i'tidāl (upright balance) support moderateness as an integrated moral system reconciling individual actions with community well-being.
4. In consumerism, wasatiyyah offers an ethical paradigm that controls resource acquisition, usage, and disposal hence avoiding garbage and encouraging careful stewardship (khilāfah).
5. While i'tidāl fosters self-control, humility, and social equity, israf not only damages environmental and economic conditions but also erodes spiritual awareness.
6. Offering a practical model for sustainable and ethical living, the teachings and actions of Muhammad (ﷺ) demonstrate a life of simplicity, equilibrium, and careful consumption.

Recommendations

1. To foster responsible consumption patterns, educational institutions and religious platforms should integrate the principles of wasatiyyah and i'tidāl into courses and sermons.
2. Communities should embrace environmentally conscious behaviors like reducing waste, conserving water and energy, and minimizing unnecessary luxury.

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