



WASATIA
The Spirit of Islam

Professor Mohammed Dajani Daoudi
Palestine - Wasatia Founding Director



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{And thus We have made you a middle-ground nation.}

[Holy Quran, Baqarat (Cow) Surah, verse 143]

The **Wasatia** Rainbow

It takes both rain and sunshine to make a rainbow. In a similar way, it takes both fanaticism and submission to make **wasatia**. Though the winds of adversity is trying to blow our values away, our audacity and determination is so strong and vigorous that we will keep pushing that those values will continue spreading and growing to new heights.

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DEDICATION

To all unfortunate victims of extremism, radicalism, and terrorism

Preface

At a time when paganism had spread its grip even beyond the sands of Arabia, Islam descended in 610 A. D. and Muhammad, at the age of forty was awakened from a trance by the voice of Angel Gabriel that commanded him to read. "Proclaim (*Recite*)", he was told sternly. "But what shall I proclaim? *I am no literate*", the startled Muhammad gasped. Three times did the voice call and three times did Muhammad give that same answer. Finally the voice of the angel said:

{"Proclaim in the name of thy Lord, the Creator who created, created man from a clot of blood. Proclaim! Your Lord is most gracious (bountiful). It is He who has taught man by the pen that which he does not know."}

The Arabs were greatly honored that God had chosen an Arab to relay the message of Islam.

- *{" We have sent you forth but as a blessing to mankind."}*
[Holy Quran, Prophets Surah; verse 107]

The Arab land encompasses the most holy Islamic shrines. It was Arab arms that were chosen to be the first to carry the banners of the call. The Arabic language was chosen to be the language of the Holy Book.

- *{" We have revealed the Koran in the Arabic tongue so that you may grow in understanding."}* [Holy Quran, Joseph Surah; verse 1]

Yet, all those privileges end there. Islam does not belong to the Arabs, nor did the Arabs ever claim that they have privilege rights on Islam.

The message of Islam was sent forth to guide all mankind, and the Quran was descended in all parts of the world throughout all periods of time. As a matter of fact, the word "the world" is repeated seventy times in the Holy Book and the audience is addressed as, "Oh People!" rather than, "Oh Muslims!"

I. Introduction

“Without religion there can be no true morality; without morality there can be no true religion.” Talmud

Moderation is an old yet neglected virtue; similarly, *wasatia* [moderation and centrism] is an essential yet ignored Islamic doctrine. The purpose of this book is to shed light on this important concept particularly as adopted in Islam. The *wasatia* ideology is based on religious moderate teachings and heritage. Its ideologues are driven by a moderate centrist vision affirmed in religious thought and practice. The approach raises the questions: Who speaks for Islam? From which vintage point can we consider moderation and immoderation in Islam? How can we define what moderation and immoderation amount to in Islam? By what standard can we identify and judge moderate and extremist Islamic states? Can *Wasatia* address effectively the needs and demands of people under colonial occupation and siege? What is the shape of the future that *Wasatia* promises in Palestine? Would *Wasatia* ideology and thought provide the inspiration to lead a real renaissance based on religion? What are the future prospects for Islamic moderate forces such as *Wasatia* in Palestine and elsewhere?

Wasatia compelling answers to all these questions have been largely ignored in the West. In searching for answers, “The Holy Quran is the *marja’iya* [reference guide]” and “*al-ijtihad* [independent rational reasoning] is the method.” The Quran remains the treasure house from which all the ideas expressed in this book are derived.

The pervasive perception is that the prominence of extremism in the world would give rise to the strong support of moderation and moderate trends, parties, and movements. Unfortunately, such is not the case. Thus, this poses the enduring persistent question: What is most important to us? Do we want to have moderation in our lives and politics? If so, what should we do to achieve that? Are our priorities in order? The clock is ticking. Noah did not wait until the flood came to build his ark. Focusing on radical Islamic movements is making many Western observers underestimate the glowing appeal of Wasatia among the Muslim masses. The strength of Wasatia flows from its secure grounding in the sacred text of the Holy Quran as a major source for its vision, ideology and thinking.

II. Wasatia: Meaning and Significance

Linguistically, the term Wasatia is derived from the Arabic word "*wasat*" meaning: "middle of the road," or "center of the circle." The top of the mountain is its center; also, the largest jewel falls in the center of a necklace. In the spring and in the fall, the sun stands at the balancing point, at the center. The word implies a balance of extremes-- between rich and poor, high and low, empty and full, rashness and cowardice.

Religiously, *wasat* is used in the *Holy Qur'an* to mean: justice, moderation, middle ground, centrism, tolerance, temperance, and fairness. Like the word "equinox", *wasatia* is about balance. To activate peace and justice in the current climate of escalating fear and violence, one must reclaim that balance between adulation and hate, affinity and enmity, deep despair and high expectations.

General definitions of moderation include:

- Quality of being moderate, observing reasonable limits, and avoiding extremes
- Temperance: the trait of avoiding excesses
- The action of lessening in severity or intensity
- The process of eliminating or lessening extremes.
- Doing something at an appropriate amount.
- The process of ensuring that assessments conducted is fair, reliable, transparent, consistent, and objective

THE USES OF LANGUAGE

The Western Arabic lexicon is growing fast and Arabic terms such as *Quran* [Kuran, Koran], *Fatah*, *Hamas*, *Hizballah*, *Jihad al-Islami*, *Qa'eda* [base], *Intifada* [uprising], *Muqata'a* [district], etc. has become part of the English dictionary, as on the other side, terms such as sandwich, Kleenex, computer, cinema, television, hamburger, telephone, radio, etc. has become part of the Arabic dictionary. Also, the English language has been invaded by Islamic terms such as *rasul* [apostle], *hadith* [saying], *caliph* [successor], *hijra* [migration], *fatwa*, *mahdi*, *mufti*, *sheikh* [religious scholar], *iman* [faith], *hajj* [pilgrimage], *masjid* [mosque], *shahada* [testimony], *ummah* [community], *hadith* [saying], *jihad* [struggle], *shari'a* [law], *shurah* [consultation], *hudna* [armistice], *tahde'a* [lul]. But unfortunately the important Islamic term and concept of *wasatia* [*wasateyyah/wasatieh*] has yet to be introduced to the western public¹.

So far, the essential dilemma between the Western community and the Moslem *ummah* lies deep in the manner and ways of communication. Part of the problem lies in translation. Much of the intention of the author is lost in the translation of the text. In this case, translation of the Quran does not and cannot reproduce the rhyme,

¹ Google search results conducted in November 2006 show: 11,600,000 for Islamic terrorism; 6,040,000 for Islamic jihad; 2,830,000 for Islamic fundamentalism; 898,000 for Islamic radicalism; 481,000 for Islamic *shura*; 2,740 for Islamic *shurah*; 265 for Islamic *wasatia*; 83 for Islamic *wasatia*; 7 for Islamic *wasatieh*; 1,560 for *wasatia*; 109 for *wasatia*. (November 2006). In August 2009, the search for *wasatia* showed: 3,490 for *wasatia*; 1,870 for *wasatia*; 174 for *wasatieh*.

rhythm, cadence, and spirit of the original text and to that extent loses much in aesthetic value and emotional appeal.

In general, there are two approaches to translating the Holy Quran. The first is *al-tafsir*, i. e. explanation and factual interpretation. For instance the translation of the verse,

- {“*Thus have We made of you an Ummatan Wasatan.*”} [Cowan Surah; verse 143]

Also translated as:

- {“And so we have created you a moderate community.”}
- {“We have made you a just community.”}
- {“Thus have We made of you an *Ummat* justly balanced.”}
- {“We have made you a temperate nation.”}
- {“We have created you a just nation.”}
- {“We have made you a midground nation.”}
- {“We have made you a justly balance nation.”}

The second is *al-ta’wiil*: symbolic and allegoric interpretation. For instance, the flood in the narrative of Noah represents the ocean of matter which swallows those engulfed in its flood. Salvation is possible only by boarding the ship of divine law.

A cultural problem arises when the West addresses the Moslem world using Western terminology². For instance, they speak to Moslems

² This is similar to the idea the Japanese call *oyakudachi*, which means, “walking in the shoes of the other.” As Atticus Finch advises his daughter Jean “Scout”, in “To kill a Mocking Bird”: “*You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.*”

in terms of the Western concept of democracy rather than the Islamic concept of *Shurah* [consultation], and using the Western term 'moderation' rather than the Islamic term *wasatia*, the term 'law' rather than *shari'a*, and in terms of Western concepts of parliamentarianism and globalization, which they take from their own culture and traditions. As one American professor puts it, this is "like a cricket reporter describing a cricket game in baseball terms".

Thus to reach the Moslem community, one has to use Islamic language and concepts³. As stated in the *Holy Quran*, it is wise to talk to people in their own language to explain to them distinctly in order for them to understand and respond to you:

- {*Each apostle We have sent has spoken only in the language of his own people, so that he might make plain to them his message.*} [Abraham Surah; verse 4]

Interfaith dialogue need to focus on the concept of *wasatia/moderation* in the three religions to deal with the essential dilemmas between the Western world and the Muslim world. The West addresses the Islamic world using Western lexicon, but it would be better – far better – to use the religious language and concepts of the Qur'an. Arab terms such as *intifada*, *fatwa*, *shari'a*, and *jihad* have among many others entered into the consciousness of the Western world. Thus it is time for the term *wasatia* to become part of the lingo between East and West.

³ Here, one is reminded of *Fulla*, a *Barbie* - like fashion doll created in Damascus and marketed to young Moslem girls as an alternative to Barbie. The doll hit stores in late 2003, and since then the sales of Barbie dolls in Islamic countries dropped dramatically in its favor. *Fulla* offered a role-model to many Arab young girls, displaying how most Moslem people prefer their daughters to dress and behave.

III. Wasatia: Shared Religious Values

(“Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal?”) [Mahatma Gandhi, 1908]

Religious dialogue, or rather lack of it, has been the nature of the historic hostility between the three civilizations - the civilization based on the Torah, the civilization based on the Bible, and the civilization based on the Quran. The three religions talk about making the world a better place by serving God. The Jews are guided by the Taurat (Torah), the Christians by the Ingeel, (Bible, which is the Evangelion or Gospel - namely the New Testament), and the Moslems are guided by the *Holy Quran*. A Jew, Christian or Moslem, ought to behave according to the rules of religion as set down in the Holy Books.

- *“For every community We have ordained a ritual which they observe.”*} [Pilgrimage Surah; verse 66]

The Quran recognizes the preceding Holy Scriptures:

- *{And to you, We have revealed the Book with the truth. It confirms the Scriptures which came before it and stands as a guardian over them.}* (Ma’eda (Table) Surah; verse 48}
- *“Thus have We revealed the Book to you.[Muhammad]. Those to whom We gave the scriptures believe in it, and so do*

some of your own people. Only the unbelievers deny Our signs”} [Spider Surah; verse 47]

Jews, Christians, and Muslims all worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, and await the Day of Judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead.

- *{“God is our Lord and your Lord; for us falls the responsibility for our deeds and for you for your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and to him is our final destination.”}* [Consultation Surah; verse 15]
- *{“Be courteous when you argue with the People of the Book, except with those among them who do evil. Say: “We believe in that which has been revealed to us and which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one. To Him we submit.”}* [Spider Surah; verse 47]
- *[“Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?”* (Mathew, 2:10)]

The most close to God are the pious and righteous:

- *“The most honored in the sight of Allah is (he who is) most righteous.”* (Al Imran Surah; verse 86).
- *“Those that believe in God and His apostles are the truthful ones.”}* [Hadid Surah; verse 19]

The Talmud states:

- *{“The pious among all nations will have a share in the life to come.”}*

For this reason, Jews, Christians, and Muslims esteem an upright life and worship God by way of prayers, charity, fasting, and the promotion of peace, social justice, and practicing moral values. Similar to the other two faiths, Islam is a civilization; it is a religion that gave first and foremost wide and unique social and legal systems that engulf the individual, society and nations with rules of behavior.

Islam views the world and humanity as multi-nations, multi-cultures, and, multi-religions. Islam reveres and respects all heavenly religions and calls the faithful to believe in God, His Angels, His Apostles, His Holy Books:

- *{“He has revealed to you the Book with the Truth confirming the scriptures which preceded it. He has already revealed the Torah and the Ingeel (Gospel) before for the guidance of mankind, and the distinction between right and wrong.”}* {Imran Surah; verse 3}
- *{“O mankind! We have indeed created you from one man and one woman, and have made you into various nations and tribes so that you may know one another; indeed the more honorable among you, in the sight of Allah, is one who is more pious among you; indeed Allah is All Knowing, All Aware..”}* {Hujurat Surah; verse 13}
- *{“Had your Lord pleased, He would have united all mankind. But only those whom He has shown mercy will cease to differ. For this end He has created them.”}* [Houd Surah; verse 118].
- *{“Had your Lord pleased, He would have made you one nation.”}* [Table Surah; verse 48].

- *{“Among His other signs are the creation of heaven and earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for all mankind.”}* [Greeks Surah; verse 22]
- *{“Had it been Allah’s will, He could have made them all of one religion.”}* [Shura Surah; verse 8]
- *{“Had He pleased, He would have guided you all aright.”}* [Bee Surah; verse 9]
- *{“We raised an apostle in every nation, proclaiming: “Worship God and avoid false deities. Amongst them were some whom Allah guided, and others destined to go astray.”}* [Bee Surah; verse 36]
- *{“Oh People, We have created you from a male and a female and divided you into nations and tribes that you might get to know one another. The noblest of you in God's sight is he who fears Him most.”}* [Chambers Surah; verse 13]

Islam makes the faith of the Muslim incomplete until one believes in God and His Apostles without any distinction:

- *{“O believers! Believe in God and His Messenger; and the revelation which He has sent to His Messenger, and the revelations which He sent to those before him. Those who deny God, and his angels, His Books, His messengers, and the Day of Judgment, have gone far, far astray.”}* [An-Nissa (Women) Surah; verse 136]
- *{“Those that deny God and His Apostles and those that draw a line between God and His apostles, saying: “We believe in some, but deny others,’ – thus seeking a middle way- these indeed are the unbelievers... As for those that believe in Allah and His apostles and discriminate against none of them, they shall be rewarded by God.”}* [An-Nisa’ (Women) Surah; verse 150-151]
- *{“Those that believe in God and His apostles are the truthful ones.”}* [Hadid Surah; verse 19]

- *{“Say: We believe in Allah and that which is revealed to us; in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction amongst any of them, and to God we submit ourselves.”}* [Baqara Surah; verse 136]

The Quran cites both the Torah and the Bible describing them as truthful revealed for the guidance of people:

- *{“He has revealed to you the Book with the truth, confirming the scriptures which preceded it; for He has already revealed the Torah and the Gospel for the guidance of men, and the distinction between right and wrong.”}* [Imran Surah; verse 3 & 4]

Moslems are urged to seek council from Christians and Jews in understanding the Holy Quran:

- *{“If you are in doubt of what We have revealed to you, ask those who have read the scriptures before you.”}* [Yunis Surah; verse 94]

Muslims are allowed to eat same food of Christians and Jews and to marry from them:

- *{“All good and pure things are made lawful to you this day. The food of the People of the Book is lawful to you, and yours is lawful to them. (Lawful to you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but also chaste women from among the People of the Book.”}* [Al-Maeda (Table) Surah; verse 6]

Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity important values such as:

MODERATION

Islam calls on Muslims to be temperate (moderate) and to take mid-ground position in compliance with the *Holy Quran* (Baqarat Surat; verse 143): {Thus have We made of you an Ummatan justly balanced.}

The concept of moderation (*wasatia*) is reflected in a variety of *Quranic* verses such as:

- {“Do not squander (your wealth) wastefully, for the spendthrifts (wasteful) are Satan’s brothers.”} [Israa’ Surah; verses 26-27]
- {“And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (like a spendthrift. So that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty.”} (Be neither miserly nor prodigal, for then you should either be reproached or be reduced to penury.) {Israa’ Surah; verse 29}
- {“Pray neither with too loud a voice nor in a low voice, but seek between these extremes a middle course.”} [Israa’ Surah; verse 110]
- {“Do not treat men with scorn, nor walk proudly on the earth: Allah does not love the arrogant and the vainglorious. Rather let your gait be modest and your voice low: the harshest of voices is the braying of the ass.”} [Luqman Surah; verse 19]
- {“...Eat and drink, but avoid excesses. He does not love the intemperate (He likes not those who waste by extravagance).”} [Al-Araaf Surah; verse 31]

- {“O people of the Book! Do not transgress (overstep) the bounds of your religion, nor say of God anything but the truth.”} [An-Nisaa Surah; verse 171]
- {“As for those who are scornful and proud, He will sternly punish them.”} [An-Nisaa Surah; verse 173]

These *surahs* in the *Holy Quran* among many others tend to capture the religious mind set of the Moslem people. In adopting this approach, the Moslem majority are adhering more to the message of Islam than to the call of the radical adherents to Islam. The gap is and has always been very wide between the song and the singer.

Prophet Mohammed warned Muslims: "*Beware of Extremism in your religion.*" Similarly, Jewish sages have urged: "*Don't be overly righteous.*"

Similar metaphors employed in Islam and Judaism are found in the following:

- [“When Prophet Mohammed passed by the Sixth sky, he met with an angel composed half of snow and half of fire; the snow would not extinguish the fire, and the fire would not melt the snow, and the angel was praying for God who conciliated between snow and fire, to conciliate between the hearts of his peaceful believers.”] [Israa’ Prophet Pilgrimage]
- [“The Torah may be likened to two paths, one of fire, the other of snow. Turn in one direction, and you will die of heat: turn to the other and you die of the cold. What should you do? Walk in the middle.”] [Talmud: Hagigah, 2:1]

Similarly, Judaism and Christianity call for moderation. Both faiths emphasize the avoidance of extremes, and the rejection of fanaticism and radicalism.

- *“Give me neither poverty nor riches.”* [Proverbs. XXX.8]
- *“A soft answer turneth away wrath.”* [Prov. 15:1]
- *“He that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.”* [Prov. 15:18]
- *“Let your moderation be known unto all men.”*
[Philippians 4:5]
- *“Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself.”* [ECCL. 7:16]
- *“Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.”* [1 COR. 9:25]
- *“The fruit of the spirit is ... temperance.”* [GAL. 5:22, 23]
- *“Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.”* [EPH. 5:18]
- *“A bishop must be ... sober, just, holy, temperate.”* [TIT. 1:7,8]
- *“Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance.”* [2 PET, 1:5,6]
- *“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”* [Jas. 1:19]
- *“Three things are good in small quantities and bad in large: yeast, salt, and hesitation.”* [Talmud: Berakoth, 34a]

- *“There are eight things of which a little is good and much is bad: travel, mating, wealth, work, wine, sleep, spiced drinks, and medicine.”* [Talmud: Gittin, 70a]
- *“Too much sitting aggravates hemorrhoids; too much standing hurts the heart; too much walking hurts the eyes; so divide your time between the three.”* [Talmud: Kethuboth, 111b]
- *“Too much good food is worse than too little bad food.”*
Jewish proverb
- *“Moderation is the silken string running through the pearl chain of all virtues.”* In his introduction to Christian Moderation Joseph Hall, Bishop of Norwich (1574-1656)]
- *“A disposition of the mind which sets bounds to the passions.”* Saint Thomas Aquinas
- *“An angelic exercise....A greater good than marriage.”*
Saint Augustine

PEACE

Islam calls for peace in many verses.

- {*“Call for peace and if they lean to peace, then leanth thou too to it. And trust in Allah; Verily He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.”*}
[Holy Quran, Surahs (Muhammad Surah; verse 35 & Al-Anfal Surah; verse 61)]

- {*“Their salutation on the Day they meet Him will be “Peace”; and He has prepared for them a generous reward.”*} [Confederates Surah; verse 44]
- *“Shall I not inform you of a better act than fasting, alms, and prayers? Making peace between one another...”* [Prophet Mohammed]

The spirit of peace in Judaism is reflected in the words of Prophet Isaiah 2:4:

- *“And he shall judge among the nations, they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more”.*
- *“Scholars expand peace in the world” “Talmeedai chachameem marbeen shalom ba’olam”* [Hebrew Bible]
- *“Peace is to man what yeast is to dough.”* [Hebrew Bible]
- *“The reward for righteousness is peace.”* [Hebrew Bible, Book of Proverbs]
- *“Ask for peace and chase peace.”* [Psalms, 37:14]
- *“Peace will not rise by force, but only through understanding.”* [Jewish Proverb]
- *“Better a bad peace than a good war.”* [Jewish Proverb]

Similarly, Christianity values peace:

- *“Have peace with one another.”* [The Bible; Mark 5:90]
- *“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.”* [The Bible; Mathew 5:9]
- *“And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.”* [Rom 11-1]

- *“Guide our feet into the way of peace.”* [The Bible; Luke 1:79]
- *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”* [The Bible; Luke 2:14]

FORGIVENESS

One of the important values shared by the three religions is forgiveness echoed in the Holy Quran in many verses:

- *{Kind words with forgiveness are better than charity followed by insult.}* [Cow Surah; verse 263]
- *{“The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah, for Allah loves not those who do wrong.”}* [Ash-Shura Surah; verse 40]

The same sentiment is echoed in Christian Lord's Prayers: "Forgive those who trespass against us." Research shows that learning to forgive those who hurt us can have profound benefits. It helps to manage anger, cut stress, and improve relations, and can be a powerful antidote to hate and bitterness.

- *“Be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”* [Eph. 4:32]

JUSTICE

Islam asserts essentiality of prescribing justice and forbidding evil. In Islam, the centrality of justice is displayed in many Quranic verses:

- {“God commands justice and fair dealing...”} [Quran 16:90]
- {“O you who believe, be upright for God, and (be) bearers of witness with justice!...”} [Quran 5:8]
- {“We sent Our Messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Measure in order to establish justice among the people...”} [Quran 57:2]
- {“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even if it be against yourselves, your parents, and your relatives, or whether it is against the rich or the poor...”} [Quran 4:135]
- {“...Say: I believe in the Scripture, which God has sent down, and I am commanded to judge justly between you...”} [Quran 42:15]
- {“...If you judge, judge between them with justice...”} [Quran 5:42]
- {“...When you speak, speak with justice, even if it is against someone close to you...”} [Quran 6:152]
- {“We have revealed to you the scripture with the truth that you may judge between people by what God has taught you.”} [Quran 4:105]
- {“...Be just, for it is closest to God-consciousness...”} [Quran 5:8]

- {“And approach not the property of the orphan except in the fairest way, until he [or she] attains the age of full strength, and give measurement and weight with justice...”} [Quran 6:152, also see 89:17, 93:9, and 107:2]
- {“Let not the hatred of a people swerves you away from justice. Be just, for this is closest to righteousness...”} [Quran 5:8]
- {“God does not forbid you from doing well and being just to those who have neither fought you over your faith nor evicted you from your homes...”} [Quran 60:8]
- {“God commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, judge with justice...”} [Quran 4:58]

Generally speaking, all faiths consider justice as an obligation and injustice as a sin. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism consider justice to be a supreme virtue. Their standards of justice transcend considerations of race, religion, color, and creed. The faithful are commanded to be just and that justice be met for all, as an inherent right of being human. Justice is a basic objective of Islam; the Quran considers justice to be a supreme virtue laying much emphasis on doing justice and being just. The central concept of justice is embodied in the words *Adl*, *Qist*, *Wasat* - “center”-, and *Mizan*- “scale”. One of God's attributes is that He stands firm on justice, *qa'm bi'l qist*. The Quranic concept of justice is about balance. Man has the freedom to disobey, thus, bringing the imbalance in this world. And it is to all of us, all human beings, to keep the balance or to cause an imbalance to return to balance. In all cases, it is we who determine our destination here on Earth or in the life-after. Justice is the scale that keeps everything in balance. The imbalance caused by injustice is re-balanced by the Mercy of God. This is exactly the mission

of the just. And it is to all of us believers to keep the balance or to seek balance when there is an imbalance.

In Judaism, justice is expressed in the Scripture as thus: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, even so do to them." Also, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." (Genesis, Chapter 18)

Christianity views justice as one of the cardinal virtues. It is the moderation between selfishness and selflessness. The concept of justice is expressed in this passage from Romans:

- "Render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to who fear, honor to who honor; owe no man anything but to love one another."
- "As every man hath received the gift, so let him minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."
- Justice is getting due reward or punishment for what is deserved. God is merciful but He is also just (Deut. 32:4 - righteous) and must punish sin. In the grace of God, justice fell upon His Son so that mercy would fall upon us." [See also Prov. 8:15; Gen. 18:19; Heb. 10:38].

CHARITY

All the three religions call on their followers to be charitable.

- *"To be charitable in public is good, but to give alms to the poor in private is better and will atone for some of your sins."* [Al-Baqarah Surah; verse 271]

- *{“Therefore attend to your prayers, render the alms levy, and hold fast to God; for He is your Guardian.”}* [Pilgrimage Surah; verse 79]
- *{“You are called upon to give in the cause of God.”}* [Muhammad Surah; verse 38]
- *“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”* [Cor. 13:13]
- *“Let all your things be done with charity.”* [1 Cor. 16:14]

GOLDEN RULE

- “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary.” [Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 3/9]
- “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” [Jesus, Matthew, 7:12]
- “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.” [Prophet Mohammed, Hadith]

Wasatia annual conferences are held on March 21, a day that marks the beginning of spring, a blooming warm season that falls in between the hot summer season and the cold winter season. Springtime is about regeneration. What was hidden, hibernating, or silently waiting bursts forth in glorious affirmation of the beauty and bounty of life. It calls for regenerating that seed of peace that lies encoded in the spirit.

IV. Wasatia: The Spirit of Islam

(“Political peace is useless without religious peace.”)

[Mohammed Dajani]

Omar ben al-Khatib, the second Muslim caliph, looked at his captured enemy of Islam, al-Harmizan, and asked him: “Do you have any last wish?” The chained prisoner, a pagan military leader who had fought many battles against Islam, looked tired, afraid, and weak. “Yes,” he responded, “a drink of water.”

When the pitcher of water was brought in, the prisoner seemed hesitant to drink. Then he gazed at Omar and inquired: “Am I safe till I drink this water?” The Caliph nodded his head assuring him he was. The prisoner held the pitcher in his shaken hands and then instead of drinking the water, he made the pitcher slip from his hands spilling the water all over the floor.

Omar ordered that he be taken away and put to death. Al-Harmizan stared at him and protested defiantly: “But didn’t you give me your word a minute ago that I will be safe till that water is drunk?” Omar turned to his men and said: “He made us give him a safe conduct before we did realize it. Set him free.”

This is the true spirit of Islam. Omar knew that he was not bound by a word taken in trickery but he allowed his compassion to overcome his political judgment to punish and revenge. This is the true spirit of Islam. The Muslim ruler is required by his faith to let the mercy of God determine his actions.

SOURCES OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS

There are two major sources of Islam: The Holy Quran and the *Sunnah*.

- *“I leave behind two things, the Quran and the Sunnah, and if you follow these you will never go astray.”*
[Quoted from the Prophet’s ‘Farewell Sermon’ delivered on Mount Arafat in the year 632]

THE HOLY QURAN: LOST IN INTERPRETATION

{“And the Word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and in justice. None can change His Words.”} (Cattle Surah; verse 115)

The text of the Holy Quran is known and thus no new text can be added or old text altered, changed or modified. Here, the knot lies in the interpretation as well as in the translation; how the Quranic text is being translated? But more importantly to the Muslim community, the problem lies in how the Quranic text is being interpreted, when and why: To promote values of hatred, enmity, conflict and war with other,

or peace, love, pluralism, respect, empathy, coexistence, understanding, and cooperation.

For instance, what does the verse *{The religion to God is Islam.}* [Al Imran Surah; verse 19] mean? How is it being interpreted: to reflect exclusivity or inclusivity?

There are different interpretations for the meaning of ‘Islam’. As a noun, the word ‘Islam’ is used in three senses: religion, state, and culture. As verb it is used in two senses:

1. General meaning of the term “Islam”:

In this interpretation, the word ‘Islam’ literally means surrender, technically submission to the will of God. Both Abraham and his son surrendered to God’s sacrificial order. Abraham thus became the first Muslim. Thus the term would include all those who submit themselves to the will of God: Moslems, Christians, and Jews. So the verse, *{The religion to God is Islam.}*, equates Islam with the other two heavenly Abrahamic faiths. This interpretation is widespread among the Muslim elites in line with the following verses:

- *{“Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian. He was an upright man, one who submitted to God.”}* [Al Imran Surah; verse 67]
- *{“And when they both submitted to God, and Abraham had laid down his son prostrate upon his face, We called out to him, saying: ‘Abraham, you have fulfilled your vision.”}* [Ranks Surah; verse 105]

- *{O believers! Surrender yourselves wholeheartedly to God.}* [Cow surah; verse 208].
- *{Say: O People of the Book! Come to that which is common between us and you; that we worship none but God, and that we ascribe divinity to nothing besides Him; and that we shall not take human beings for our lords besides God. And if they refuse, then say: ‘Bear witness that it is we who have surrendered ourselves unto Him.}* [Al Imran surah; verse 64].
- *{“Say: ‘It is revealed to me that your God is one God. Will you submit to Him?’”}* [Prophets Surah; verse 107]
- *{“He has chosen you, and laid on you no burdens in the observance of your faith, the faith of Abraham your father. In this, as in former scriptures, He has given you the name of Muslims, so that the Apostle may testify against you, and that you yourselves may testify against your fellow-men.”}* [Pilgrimage Surah; verse 78]
- *{“Say: “We believe in that which has been revealed to us and which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one. To Him we submit.”}* [Spider Surah; verse 47]

2. Specific Meaning of the term “Islam”:

In this interpretation, the word ‘Islam’ is explained to mean exclusively the Muslim faith. Thus the verse, *{The religion to God is Islam.}*, makes Islam as the one religion to God excluding the other two

heavenly Abrahamic faiths. This interpretation is widespread among the Muslim masses.

Here, the question this poses is: Is a Muslim in the eyes of God better than a Christian or a Jew? Should one become a Muslim to be a 'Muslim'? Should a Jew or a Christian adopt Islam to become a Muslim? Does Islam urge Christians and Jews to forsake Judaism and Christianity and adopt Islam in order to enter heaven?

In seeking answers in the Holy Quran to these questions, we find that it responds to all questions: Definitely NOT.

Another example is the interpretation of the verse,

- *{“Thus have We made of you an Ummatan Wasatan (justly balanced- Mid-ground nation).”}* [Cow Surah (286 verses); verse 143]

This surah in the Holy Quran among many others tends to capture the religious mind set of the Moslem people which calls upon Moslems to avoid extremism, such as: {“Be neither miserly nor prodigal, for then you should either earn reproach or be reduced to penury”.} [Isra’ Surah; verse 27]. In the Quranic Surah of Al-In’am, verse 153, God instructs Muslims to avoid extremist religious practices. Prophet Muhammad is quoted to have said: “The best affairs are those that are centrist.”

So, how is the verse *{“We have created you ummattan wasatan”}* interpreted?

1. Interpretation I: In the Holy Quran, *wasat* is used to mean, justice, balance, moderation, centrism: The Islamic nation is a just and moderate nation.
2. Interpretation II: Muslims take a mid-ground interpretation that stands between those who sanctify literally the text and tradition and those who opt for rational thinking and *ijtihad* (analytical explanation) in reading, comprehending, and understanding the surahs in the Holy Quran.
3. Interpretation III: Muslims are center between Jews “who brought God’s anger at them”; and Christians “who have gone astray.”
4. Interpretation IV: Muslims are ‘moderate’ between Jews who are too strict in implementing the text of the Talmud; and Christians who are too liberal in implementing the text of the Bible.
5. Interpretation V: Muslims stand in-between “Jews who killed prophets” and “Christians who made their prophet a God.”
6. Interpretation VI: Muslims are midway between those communities which prayed for many gods and those communities which did not believe in any god.

Now, the important questions are: Which interpretation to select? How to decide which to select? According to what criteria?

In selecting the first and second interpretations, we were guided by the Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* where *wasat* is used to mean temperance, justice, balance, moderation, and centrism. Actually one of the signs

that guided us to make this selection lies in the fact that this verse is number 143 while the Cow surah contains 286 verses so this verse comes exactly in the midst of the surah.

Moderate Islamic scholars interpret the term: “*Ummattan Wasatan* (Mid-Ground Nation)” to mean that the Muslim community is a centrist, moderate peaceful nation seeking justice and fairness, and interpret the term ‘wasat’ to mean ‘justice’, moderation, centrism, balance as explained by Prophet Muhammad.

Similarly, in interpreting the rest of the verse: “So that you may be held witness over people and the Prophet be witness over you,” How is this verse interpreted? A widespread interpretation is:

“Nuh (Noah) will be called on the Day of Resurrection and he will say, ‘Labaik wa Sa’daik, O my Lord! Allah would say, ‘Did you convey Our message of Islamic Monotheism?’ Nuh (Noah) will say, ‘Yes.’ His nation will then be asked, ‘Did he (Noah) convey Our message of Islamic Monotheism to you?’ They will say, ‘No warner came to us.’ Then Allah will say [to Nuh (Noah)], ‘Who will bear witness in your favour?’ He will say, ‘Muhammad and his followers.’ So they (i.e. Muslims) will testify that he conveyed the Message – and the Messenger (Muhammad) will be a witness over you, and that is what is meant by the Statement of Allah: We made you pure Muslims -- real believers of Islamic Monotheism, true followers of Prophet Muhammad and his Sunnah (legal ways)] a just (and the best) nation that you be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger (Muhammad) will be a witness over you.” [*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 6/4487(O. P. 14)]

This interpretation is not in harmony with the many verses in the Quran that asserts God is all-knowing and would not need to ask Noah

or the other prophets, ‘Did you convey Our message of Islamic Monotheism?’ Here are some of those verses:

- {*"Are you not aware that God has knowledge of what heaven and earth contain? All is recorded in a Book. That is easy enough for God."*} [Pilgrimage Surah; verse 70]
- {*"Say: 'Would you tell God of your religion, when God knows what the heavens and the earth contain? God has knowledge of all things.'"*} [Chambers Surah; verse 16]
- {*"God knows, but you know not."*} [Cow Surah; verse 216]
- {*"He knows what is before and behind men."*} [Cow Surah; verse 255]; also, [The believers Surah; verse 75]
- {*"God has knowledge of all your actions."*} [Al Imran Surah; verse 156]
- {*"He is the One Who hears and knows all."*} [Cattle Surah; verse 115]
- {*"He knows all that goes into the earth and all that emerges from it, all that comes down from heaven and all that ascends to it. He is with you wherever you are. God is cognizant of all your actions."*} [Iron Surah; verse 4]

In interpreting this verse we are guided by the preceding verse 142 that states: {*He guides whom He will to the right path.*} [Cow Surah; verse 142]; then comes verse 143: “And We have created you *Ummattan wassatan* – Centrist, Mid-Ground Nation,” [Al-Baqarah Surah; verse

143] The rest of the verse reads: “So that you may be held witness over people and the Prophet be witness over you.”

Thus, a logical interpretation would be:

- i. God guides whom He will to the right path.
- ii. God has determined that the right path is one which is moderate and centrist.
- iii. God will hold the faithful and the Prophet to be witnesses that the Muslim community is moderate and centrist.

Another example is the interpretation of the last verses of *al-Fatihah surah*: {(5) The path of those whom Thou hast blessed; (6) Not of those who incurred wrath, nor of the astray (7).

One interpretation of those last verses is: {(5) The path of those whom Thou hast blessed (Muslims); (6) Not of those who incurred wrath (Jews), nor of the astray (Christians) (7).

Another interpretation for those same last verses of *al-Fatihah surah* is: {(5) The path of those whom Thou hast blessed (Any human being who submitted oneself to God and followed God’s instructions); (6) Not of those who incurred wrath (Any human being who defied God), nor of the astray (Any human being who did not follow God’s instructions). (7).

AL-FATIHAH (1)

"The Opening"

(Revealed at Mecca, Verses: 7)

In the name of Allah, The Merciful, The All-merciful

Praise be to God, the Lord of the World; (1) The Merciful, the All-merciful; (2) The Master of the Day of Recompense; (3) Thee we serve, and to Thee we pray for help; (4) Guide us to the Straight Path; (5) The path of those whom Thou hast blessed; (6) Not of those who incurred wrath, nor of the astray. (7)

Thus it is important in reading the Holy Quran to read it as it ought to be read:

- *{“Say: ‘God’s guidance is the only guidance.’ And if after all the knowledge you have been given you yield to their desires, there shall be none to help or protect you from the wrath of God. Those to whom We have given the Book, and who read it as it ought to be read, truly believe in it; those that deny it will surely be the losers .”}* [Heifer (Cow) Surah; verse 121]

2. THE SUNNAH

The *Sunnah* relates to the life and *hadith* [sayings] of the Prophet that illuminates his thoughts and actions, accompanied by their sources. It is an open field. Stories about the Prophet and quotes by the Prophet are relatively abundant, in some the facts have been embellished with pious folklore, to the extent that they may openly contradict the text of the Quran. Much research is done to investigate the authenticity of those quotes, but here it also centers on who is doing the investigation and when. One well-known and wide-spread quote for the Prophet is the following:

“The Hour of Judgment will not arrive until you fight the Jews and kill them... and until trees and the rocks will say: ‘O Muslim, o servant of God, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him,’ except the salt bush [gharqad], for it is [one] of the Jews’ trees.”

This statement stands in contradiction with many verses in the Holy Quran which forbids killing such as: *{Nor take life - which Allah has made sacred - except for just cause.}* [al-Isra’ Surah; verse 33]; or those verses which call upon Muslims to revere Judaism and its prophets; or which consider Jews *Ahl al-Kitab* [People of the Book], and calls upon Moslems to respect and honor the scriptures and prophets of the People of the Book.

JEWES IN THE HOLY QURAN

There are nearly 60 verses in the Holy Quran that mention Jews or refer to them. At times, the Holy Quran uses the term, "Sons of Israel," to describe Jews. It also refers to Jews and Christians as: "People of the Book"; and "Those who were delivered the Book".

- *{“Say: People of the Book, let us come to an agreement: that we will worship none but God, that we will associate none with Him, and that none of us shall set up mortals as deities besides God.”}* [Al Imran Surah; verse 65]
- *{“Bear in mind the words of Moses to his people, He said: ‘Remember, my people, the favour which God has bestowed upon you. He has raised up prophets among you, made you kings, and given you that which He has given to no other nation. Enter, my people, the holy land which God has assigned for you. Do not turn back, and thus lose all. ‘Moses.” They replied, ‘a race of giants dwells in this land. We will not set foot in it till they are gone. As soon as they are gone we will enter.”}* [Table Surah; verse 23]
- *{“And do not dispute with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict injury; but say, ‘We believe in the Revelation which was revealed to us and in that which was revealed to you; Our God and your God is One, and it is to Him We bow.”}* [Spider Surah; verse 46]
- *{“O Children of Israel, Keep in your minds the favours I bestowed on you, and fulfill your covenant with Me as I fulfill My Covenant with you.”}* [Cow Surah; verse 40]
- *{“We saved the Israelites from the degrading scourge, from Pharaoh who was a tyrant and a transgressor, and chose them*

knowingly above the nations. We showed them miracles which tested them beyond all doubt.”} [Hadid Surah; verse 30]

- *{“Children of Israel, remember the blessing I have bestowed on you, and that I have exalted you above the nations.”}* [Cow Surah; verse 47]
- *{“And remember We took a Covenant from the Children of Israel to worship none but Allah.”}* [Cow Surah; verse 83]
- *{“Children of Israel, remember that I have bestowed favours upon you, and exalted you above the nations.”}* [Cow Surah; verse 122]
- *{“O you Children of Israel! We delivered you from your enemy, and We made a Covenant with you on the right side of Mount (Sinai), and We sent to you mann and the salwa (quails).”}* [Taha Surah; verse 80]
- *{“We did aforetime grant to the Children of Israel the Book, the Power of Command, and Prophethood; We gave them, for sustenance, things good and pure, and We favored them above the nations.”}* [Bowling the Knee Surah; verse 16]
- *{“We delivered aforetime the Children of Israel from humiliating punishment, inflicted by Pharaoh, for he was arrogant (even) among inordinate transgressors. And we chose them afore time above the nations, knowingly, and granted them signs in which there was a manifest trial.”}* [Smoke Surah; verses 30-33]
- *{“We settled the Israelites in a secure land and provided them with good things. Nor did they disagree among themselves until knowledge was given them. Your Lord will on the Day of Resurrection judge their differences.”}* [Jonah Surah; verse 93]
- *{“Our servant David, who was both a mighty and a penitent man. We made the mountains join with him in praise evening and morning, and the birds, too, in all their flocks, all were obedient to him. We made his kingdom strong, and gave him wisdom and discriminating judgement.”}* [Zaad Surah; verse 20]

- {“We said: ‘David, We have made you master in the land. Rule with justice among men and do not yield to lust, lest it turn you away from God’s path.”} [Zaad Surah; verse 26]
- {“We gave Solomon to David; and he was a good and faithful servant.”} [Zaad Surah; verse 30]

There is a persistent claim spread by many that the Quran describes all Jews as ‘Apes’. In fact, this is a misinterpretation of the following verse which says that God had punished those who transgressed in the Sabbath by turning them to apes:

- {“And you know well those amongst you who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath: We said to them: Be you apes, despised and rejected.”} [Heifer (Cow) Surah; verse 65]

In Judaism, the Jewish Bible warns: *“He who works on a Sabbath should be put to death.”*

God in the Quran chides those Jews who behaved wrongfully:

- {“There came to you Moses with clear signs, yet ye worshiped the Calf after him, and ye did behave wrongfully.”} [Heifer (Cow) Surah; verse 92]

Also, He warns Muslims that Jews and Christians may not be pleased with the Islamic faith:

- {“You will please neither the Jews nor the Christians unless you follow their faith.”} [Heifer (Cow) Surah; verse 121]

CHRISTIANS IN THE HOLY QURAN

- {*“We sent forth Noah and Abraham, and bestowed on their offspring prophethood and the scriptures... After them We sent other apostles, and after those Jesus the son of Mary. We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of his followers.”*} [Iron Sura; verse 27]
- {*After those prophets, We sent forth Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming the Torah already revealed, and gave him the Gospel, in which there is guidance and light, corroborating that which was revealed before it in the Torah, a guide and an admonition to the righteous.*} [Ma’eda (Table) Surah; verse 46]
- {*“Believers, Jews, Sabaeans, and Christians – whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right – shall have nothing to fear or to regret.”*} [Table Surah; verse 69]
- {*O believers! Be helpers of Allah. As Jesus the son of Mary said to his disciples: ‘who will be my helpers in (the work of) God?’ The disciples said: “We are God’s helpers!” At that time, a portion of the children of Israel believed, and some disbelieved. But We gave power against their enemies to those who believed, and they were the ones who prevailed.*} [As-Saf (Battle Array) surah; verse 14]
- {*“Unbelievers are those that say: ‘God is the Messiah, the son of Mary.’ For the Messiah himself said: ‘Children of Israel,*

serve God, my Lord and your Lord.’ He that worships other deities besides God, God will deny him Paradise, and the Fire shall be his home.”} [Table Surah; verse 73]

THE OMARITE COVENANT

In 636 A. D. the Muslims under Second Caliph Omar Ben al-Khatab conquered Jerusalem and the Caliph offered the inhabitants of the city safety in what became known as the Omarite Covenant. The question raised since then is: Did Caliph Omar allow the Jews to return and reside in the Holy City or stipulated in his Covenant that no Jew would reside in the city?

are different and conflicting narratives regarding the terms of truce for Jerusalem as signed between the Muslims and Christians, particularly in comparing the earlier versions of the Omarite Covenant with later versions. The original version of the Omarite Covenant did not mention the Jews in the text. However, later versions stipulate that ‘No Jew shall reside in Alia (Jerusalem.’”

The Arab historian al-Yacoubi was the first to record the text of the covenant but it was a later Arab historian Sayf bin Omar who mentioned the additional text stipulating that no Jew would live with the Christians in Jerusalem. That was not in harmony with the other Islamic truce agreements signed with those conquered at the time. A

number of Arab historians such as Bin Asaker, Mujeer Din Hanbali and Bin al-Haytham who wrote about the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem do not mention that there was any reference to Jews in the Covenant. On the contrary, Arab historians affirm that it was the Muslims under Caliph Omar who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to reside in the city. Zaki Nusseibeh in his book, ***Jews in Jerusalem***, states that the Arab Islamic takeover of Jerusalem put an end to the exile imposed on the Jews by the Romans and later by the Byzantine not to enter the city or live in it which lasted more than 500 years. A devout Jew used to come Tiberius, Gaza, or the Mount of Olives to view the ruins of the Temple, tear his clothes crying and then return back with sadness in his heart.

Arab and Jewish sources confirm that when the Jewish leaders asked Omar how many Jewish families can come back to live in Jerusalem he responded that he would first consult with the Christian Patriarch Sophronius to resolve this problem. Caliph Omar asked Sophronius about the number of families that would be agreeable for them and he responded fifty families. The Jews demanded two hundred families and so Caliph Omar settled the issue by deciding on seventy families.

The Omarite Covenant distributed in the Muslim world today and circulated in Arabic on the internet and in Palestine is the version which states that ‘No Jew would live with them in Ilia (Jerusalem)’.

V. Wasatia: Islam without Extremism

(“Terrorism and deception are weapons not of the strong but of the weak.”) [Mahatma Gandhi]

Historically, there are many shades of Islam and the shade the majority of Moslems have been adhering to the mid ground that stands between those who sanctify tradition and those who opt for rational thinking in reading and explaining the Holy Quran in compliance with the teaching of Islam. From their early history, the Moslem majority have been treading a mid course in their religious journey being neither radically fanatic nor totally secular.

The continued strength and durability of Islam derives from its emphasis on moderation, unity, and brotherhood. To a Moslem, religion and politics, faith and life, are inseparable. Islam's immense success lies in the conviction of the believer that God is one, that God is compassionate and merciful, that God is an omnipresent ruler and an omniscient judge. Islam endured hard ordeals because it is a brotherhood of men working hard to please their creator. It is that kind of brotherhood that transcends barriers of race and nation, all united in one effort: to execute God's will.

The set-backs that checked the progress of Islam stemmed from disintegration within rather than outside the Moslem faith. When Moslems adhere to their faith and practice it properly, Islam takes the ascendancy. As Moslems are lured to the dens of materialism and

become intoxicated by secular pleasures, the Islamic Ummah (nation) disintegrates and crumbles. Today our crucial dilemma is not social, political, nor even economic. It is spiritual. We are not pure enough to dare raise our eyes in the Day of Judgment and confront our Lord. Islam as a faith will, no doubt, endure time and adversity. It had already survived the test of time.

If you are a Jew, Christian or Moslem, you have to behave according to the rules of your religion as set down in your Holy Book. Radical religious speakers in their sermons or speeches that incite hatred and violence against the other, fail to reflect the spirit of their Holy Books. There is no good Islam and bad Islam but there are good Moslems and bad Moslems, as there are good Christians and bad Christians, as well as, there are good Jews and bad Jews. Radicalism and the claim of exclusive monopoly for the truth is the disease.

There is a big critical gap in the Western understanding of moderate Islam. To the West, moderate Islam is viewed in terms of advocates of violence and terrorism against Western civilization and culture, the approach to women liberation, and the role of *sharia* in society, while in reality, the issue is more complex and deep.

Radical Islamists through a radical reading of the *Holy Quran* and Islamic traditions portrayed a world of Moslems in clash with Christians and Jews. Extremists taught that the use of force to correct existing evils was legitimized by verse in the Quran which legitimizes the use of force against aggressors and a *hadith* in which the Prophet is assumed to have called on believers to use the sword to defend the faith. Islam calls upon the faithful to avoid aggression.

- {"Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors."} [Cow Surah; verse 190]

Verses from the Holy Quran were used to support the religious war waged against the 'infidel' and the 'occupier' and to frustrate all efforts to reach a peaceful compromise and establish a comprehensive peace with Israel. Thus, terms such as "*jihad*" were interpreted as: "Wage war against the other" or "Eliminate the other," rather than: "cleanse yourself of evil and hate." Returning from battle, the Prophet told his followers: "You have come back from the lesser *jihad* to the greater *jihad*., They asked: "But what is the greater *jihad*, O Messenger of God?" And he replied: "The *jihad* within. Here is where the battle needs to be won."

Misinterpretations and misquotes that call for enmity, terrorism, and violence are openly inconsistent and incompatible with the core values of Islam as stipulated in the text of the *Holy Quran* itself, notably, love, mercy, pluralism and freedom of religion. They aim to draw unquestionable support from the Moslem masses to the extremists' vision of Islamic rejuvenation, as an antidote to Islamic decline and eclipse, and as a confrontation to Westernization. Here, the Arab-Israeli conflict had played a big role in fueling this enmity and hate.

Moslems and the people of the two other Abrahamic faiths are divided by psychological, cultural, and religious chasms, sharpened about the ignorance of each other's faith and believing that what

separates them is more than what brings them together. These barriers are felt even more acutely among the religious youth, who practiced them in multiple ways in their daily lives. This necessitated the need to work to reverse this trend through education and training workshops to provide leaders of the community with the knowledge and skills to take part in building bridges of political, cultural and religious understanding in order to play a more positive role in society. For that end, Wasatia aimed to reach out to youth who are vulnerable to extremists' ideologies, activated the role of religious leaders as peace builders, and created platforms for engagement with the civic society. The goal was to make religion become part of the solution rather than remain part of the problem. In rejecting radical interpretation of the religious text, Wasatia urges Muslims to seek answers in the moderate and rational interpretation of the Holy Quran.

VI. Wasatia Palestine

A key question raised in the aftermath of the Islamic Resistance Movement's (Hamas) victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections of January 2006 is how to interpret such a victory in free and democratic elections? Could it be interpreted as a shift towards fundamentalism on the part of the Palestinians? Have the Palestinians turned their back on a Fatah-style secularism and religious moderation to embrace instead religious radicalism and political extremism? Or could it be that the Palestinian people, in their search for identity, have decided to opt for religious rather than national identity?

Traditionally, the Palestinians have been adhering to a moderate brand of Islam called wasatia ("middle-way"), which is neither radically fanatic nor totally secular.

Though the Arab-Israeli conflict began in the beginning of the 20th century as a struggle between two nationalist movements – Arab Nationalism and Zionist Nationalism, - over territory, and by the end of the century it developed into a Jewish – Moslem conflict. While politics was a major component of the conflict, its significance dwindled to make religion become a paramount ingredient of the conflict. Seizing the initiative, radicals exploited the formidable power of the faith to elicit from their followers loyalty, commitment, and willingness to sacrifice oneself for their political cause.

Under the British Mandate, Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived in a tri-religious society. The communal conflict at the time was not religious — Muslims against Jews — but rather political: Arab nationalism clashing with Zionist aspirations to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Palestine's deeply rooted Islamic moderate identity and character is often obscured. In the 1950s and 1960s, Palestinians in general refused to join the ranks of the Communist Party, while at the same time refused to support the Muslim Brotherhood since both advocated views at the end of the spectrum.

The Islamic Movement in Palestine began in the 1950s as a religious organization. Its original aim was the reform of society, but in the 1990s, it grew into an Islamic resistance movement against the Israeli occupation.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Arab world witnessed an upsurge of religious fervor unleashed by the Muslim Brotherhood on the one hand, and Communist Party activities on the other. The Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Musilmeen*) was founded in Egypt by Hassan al-Bana. It was imported into Palestine in 1947 by Palestinians studying in Egyptian universities. They went home enthusiastic to spread their dream to create an Islamic society based on Islamic principles and Islamic *shari'a*. However, this call did not receive the expected mass support among the Palestinian people. A clash erupted within the Arab world at large between the national Arab movement, viewed as progressive, and the religious Islamic movement, viewed as reactionary. Nationalism assumed predominance, particularly with the

rise in popularity of Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser in the Arab world in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez Crisis.

A group seceded from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1953 to form the Islamic Liberation Party (*Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami*), a political entity whose aim was to establish an Islamic caliphate through the political indoctrination of their members. The ideological focus of the party which lacked any practical measures to affect the daily life of the faithful resulted in few adherents and limited popular support. According to its views, the establishment of the Islamic state took priority over *jihad* to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation. It called for the revival of the Islamic way of life by fostering the education of the individual Muslim, the Islamic family, and the Muslim society to eventually bring about a Muslim state. According to their teachings, only after the Islamic state is established will its main mission be to liberate Palestine.

In contrast, the Islamic Struggle (*al-Jihad al-Islami*), advocates armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine, and considers the struggle against occupation as an official duty for all Muslims. However, it provided no social, medical, or educational services to assist the Palestinians in their daily hardships, and so has failed to muster much mass support.

Thus, it can be said that in Palestine, political currents run the spectrum from extreme left to extreme right. On the left, there are the extreme secular groups represented by such movements as the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the

Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Communist Party. On the right, there are the orthodox religious groups represented by Islamic movements, such as the Islamic Resistance Movement (*Hamas*) and Islamic *Jihad* Palestine. In the center, there is the moderate secular and religious silent majority. Using middle-ground slogans, Fatah captured and dominated the Palestinian political scene from the mid-1960s until January 2006, when the Palestinian voters in the center swung their vote to Hamas.

The question that arises then is: How has Hamas succeeded in making its historic breakthrough when the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic currents have remained peripheral in Palestinian society? One reason could be that, unlike the others, the agenda of Hamas includes not only religious but earthly matters as well, such as the provision of food, education, health care, and social services to the people and thus winning the man in the street to their side.

The Palestinian Islamic awakening began in the early 1980s — climaxing with the beginning of the first *Intifada* in November 1987, which resulted in the creation by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) as an Islamic jihadist organization with its military wing being known as the Legions of Izz Eddin al-Qassam (*Kataeb Izz el-Din al-Qassam*). In its first communiqué issued on November 15, 1987, Hamas took upon itself to vehemently resist the Israeli occupation through armed struggle. It called for the liberation of Palestine through Islamic *jihad*. Slowly, this religious movement started to make inroads in community councils and union elections, so much so that in 1992, its leaders and supporters were deported by Israel to the Lebanese borders at Marj al-Zuhur.

The main ideological tenets of Hamas are the following:

* Hamas is a resistance movement whose aim is the liberation of Palestine; it is not a political party focused on taking over the government.⁴

* Hamas considers the struggle for the sake of God (*al-jihad fi sabeel ellah*) the fight for liberation, as the major element in resisting the Zionist occupation of Palestine. It casts doubt on efforts to achieve Palestinian rights through peaceful means.

* Mandatory Palestine in its totality is an Islamic waqf that is not negotiable or divisible, or for surrender in part or in toto. Any concessions related to this land are forbidden by religion, and its liberation is a duty for all Muslims — male and female.

* Secularism does not constitute a meeting point with the Islamists.

* Palestinians are the spearhead for the resistance against the Zionist enemy. However, all Arabs and Muslims everywhere are required to join the jihad to achieve the goal of liberation.

During the months preceding the Palestinian municipal and legislative elections, the political and economic situation of the Palestinians was growing worse by the day. The continued expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the separation wall, which cuts off about 10% of the West Bank, and, finally, the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, all helped to exacerbate the situation on the ground and paved the way for Hamas to assume political power. In the party lists elections, Hamas won with only a slight majority. This would suggest that the majority is not so far-removed from Fatah in their political direction — two states alongside each other and peace with Israel. Many of the votes that went to Hamas had nothing to do with

religion and fundamentalism, but were more a protest against the occupation, poor governance, public corruption, and a desire for change. The military operations carried out by Hamas against Israeli targets, the glorification of the martyrs, and Israel's subsequent response in the form of collective punishment gave Hamas dominant popular support in the Palestinian street. The perception among Palestinians was that the Fatah leadership did not care much about them, and so Fatah was generally blamed for all the ills in Palestinian society. The efforts of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to suppress Hamas backfired, resulting in its isolation and a decline in its popularity.

Hamas reached the government through a democratic process. Consequently they had to prove themselves vis-à-vis their people by shouldering the responsibility for their welfare and well-being. The international community expected that the realities of governing and the need to provide security, jobs, and food to the people would eventually steer Hamas in the direction of meeting the requirements of the international community, namely, recognizing Israel's right to exist, denouncing terrorism, and agreeing to a negotiated process. Failing to think creatively caused Hamas to lose much of its popularity among Palestinians. What went wrong?

1. The Palestinian Authority was blamed for having allowed Hamas, an organization that did not adhere to the principles and agreements of the peace process, to participate in elections planned within the Oslo Accords framework.

2. Having won the elections, Hamas failed to abide by its election platform, which called only for “reform” and “change” and did not include the slogan of “liberation of Palestine.”

3. In forming the Palestinian government, Hamas discarded the option of forming a national government with a national agenda, instead of forming a Hamas government with a Hamas agenda.

4. Hamas failed to make a distinction between its political agenda as a religious party and the national agenda of the Palestinian people.

Upon assuming power, people expected Hamas to adopt the national agenda and proclaim as a Palestinian national government that it recognizes the State of Israel, accepts the agreements signed under the Oslo peace process in accordance with international law, and to proclaim diplomacy rather than armed struggle as the method to be employed in achieving the Palestinian aspirations of liberation and statehood. By failing to do so, Hamas put itself on a collision course with the international community.

The very fact that Hamas participated in national elections based on the Oslo agreement was an indication that it was as a political party moving towards the center. In the aftermath of the Israeli war on Gaza Hamas adopted a more moderating influence on the other radical organizations to ease the Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip.

The “two states for two peoples” formula remains the only option for achieving peace. A two-state solution to the conflict requires all participants in the democratic process to renounce violence and terror, to recognize each other, and to respect the right of the other to live in

peace. However, this cannot be achieved unless both parties resume negotiations and the both Israelis and Palestinian politics move towards the center.

The lesson to be learnt from both 1996 and 2006 Palestinian elections is that the political identity is not easy to define. Many voters who are poised between religion fundamentalism and political secularism and call themselves ‘moderates’ are not really that moderate in their views. Rather, many of them are nationalists whose views toward Israel, the United States and the West are consistent and strongly held. Thus cleaving to the center is often, but not always good politics. They do not identify with the conventional ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ labels because they are not represented by them and thus chose the ‘moderate’ label to identify themselves. This helps explain how Fatah won the 1996 Legislative elections and why Hamas won it in 2006. Both national elections showed that a sizable moderate constituency existed among the Palestinian voters. Call for change was biggest in two groups: women and youth. Both groups played a major role in recruiting voters first in 1996 to vote for Fatah and second in 2006 to Hamas. The key to Hamas success in the 2006 elections lay in winning the centrist middle ground moderate voters who disagreed with Fatah on the way it ran the government during its ten year tenure in power.

THE WASATIA INITIATIVE

The flames of religious radicalism continue to be fanned across the globe, much of the Moslem world, and in the Palestinian Territories in particular. In Palestine, Islam as a religion remains a focal point in the lives of the Palestinians and in molding and shaping the content and vision of Palestinian society. However, one of the consequences of the Israeli continued occupation of Palestinian territories has resulted in the radicalization of society. Palestinian youth are growing up believing that Palestinian Moslems, Christians and Jews are not meant to coexist, let alone thrive together.

In the last decade, Islamic religious radicalism had been getting sharper among the religious preachers of the Palestinian community. As a result, an entire generation of Palestinians is becoming increasingly radicalized in their religious views and their hostilities to the other creating communal discord rather than peaceful coexistence within the Palestinian community. There is deep ignorance about Islamic Wasatia religious values and its place in Islamic thinking even among religious Moslems.

Wasatia in Palestine was founded in January 1, 2007 to respond to the challenges facing Palestinian society. Its first booklet encompassed its vision and objectives. The booklet included its political, social and economic platform, circulating it within a small circle of Palestinian intellectual elite. In its booklet, Wasatia carved for itself multi-fold task:

(a) To clarify the distortions to which Islam has been subjected at home and in the West;

(b) To bring a deeper and more rational understanding of Islam to Moslems as well as to non-Moslems;

(c) To seek answers for the deep political, social, and economic crises inflicting the Palestinian society;

(d) To strive and work for ending the Israeli military occupation through negotiations and peaceful means;

(e) To spread and promote Islamic tolerant concepts, values and principles within the Palestinian community;

(f) To encourage the practice of moderation among Palestinians in order to mitigate religious radicalism and bigotry and reduce political extremism;

(g) To bring a message of peace, moderation, justice, coexistence, tolerance, and reconciliation to Palestinian community through vocal civic leaders;

(h) To teach creative and critical thinking and open-mindedness.

Wasatia emphasizes avoidance of extremes, the rejection of radicalism. It aspires to foster a culture of justice and balance that would attract Palestinians who are centrist in their political and religious beliefs. In fostering coexistence and tolerance, *Wasatia* aspires to create a culture in which Palestinian children will not grow up with the literature of hate and violence, but rather they will blossom in a culture of co-existence, peace, tolerance, and harmony.

The main thrust of *Wasatia* is to create a culture of moderation within the Palestinian community in the hope that this would contribute to healing political, social and religious divisions within society and help build a more peaceful community.

‘*Wasatia culture*’ in this context means tolerance, speaking out against bigotry, countering extremism and fanaticism, upholding the freedom of religion, empowering minorities such as women, and coexisting peacefully with oneself as well as the other.

This is planned through conducting a series of workshop seminars to catalyze civic leaders to become active in the process of changing the tenor of public discourse, by promoting rational thinking and behavior, and thus improve relations between Palestinian Christians and Muslims and Jews, both within their communities and in the country as a whole.

The officially arranged training workshops with extremists do not work because they degenerate into lectures by officials, or debates in which the conflicting parties fail to listen to the other. This makes open dialogue imperative. To achieve that, *Wasatia* training workshops aim to correct extremist ideas and encourage participants to discard extremist beliefs and ways of thinking by focusing on a moderate interpretation of the Holy Quran to combat the influence of radical extremists. The training workshops offer three types of education:

1. *talim* – formal education, by promoting basic knowledge and information;
2. *tarbiyyeh* – proper upbringing by focusing on ethical behavior and teaching Islamic morality;

3. *hiwar* – dialogue and discussions with radicals to hear what they have to say and to explore their point of view.

Because of the adverse political and economic conditions in Palestine, however, a moderate approach came under much fire. Radical Islamists advanced three arguments against Palestinian moderates, charging them with, a) promoting Western values rather than Islamic values, b) offering passive response to the violence of the Israeli occupation, and, c) failure to address Palestinian national aspirations of homeland and statehood. Some questioned the wisdom of adopting moderate methods to resolve a violent conflict and end military occupation. They argue that even in the case of India, Mahatma Gandhi resorted to passive resistance to end British colonization of India; that it was not dialogue and negotiations that brought independence to India, but rather people's power inspired by a visionary charismatic leader.

Nevertheless, Wasatia aims to become an eagle soaring in the skies of Palestine that would eventually be the voice of the silent majority of Palestinians who want prosperity and peaceful coexistence. It is aspired that in the forthcoming years, and by the time the next general elections will take place, the movement will be able to run in the elections and attract enough votes to play a major role in the political life of the Palestinian people. Time will come for Wasatia to emerge as a moderate political initiative that would draw the best and the brightest from among the Palestinian people.

A trend engaged in such a challenging endeavor requires a capable enlightened leadership to provide *al-qiyada al-hakima*, *al-*

rashida, wa-al-adela [just, capable and wise leadership]. The qualifications of such a leadership combine courage in the face of adversity, scholarly abilities, and personal openness that enjoy respect in their community. They are connected by long-standing personal relationship, durable intellectual connections tangibly expressed by the joint lectures, conferences, and public seminars and are known for their devotion and commitment to the Palestinian cause. They are filling a leadership void at high risk and danger to their personal safety.

Wasatia appeals to a constituency of individuals who have deep commitment to Islam and to its approach to conflict resolution through moderate and peaceful means. On this foundation Wasatia aspires to build a more promising future. The goal will remain the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, as stipulated by the Oslo Accords. However, the road to be taken is negotiations, not confrontation.

By holding Islamic values of centrism, moderation, justice, balance, and tolerance *wasatia* adopts dialogue and negotiations as the best way to resolve conflicts or differences; thus reaching a win-win situation; that out of the ashes of agony, pain, and suffering, a mutually-accepted compromise may emerge.

Wasatia is the first Islamic religious movement which calls for a negotiated peace with Israel that would help to bring solutions to the acute economic, social and political crises plaguing Palestinian society. The Wasatia political platform calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with the Old City of Jerusalem as an open city with special status, East Jerusalem as capital for the State of Palestine, and West Jerusalem as capital for the State of Israel.

Wasatia advocates the establishment of a tolerant, democratic society at home through fostering a culture of moderation and unity. It argues liberal democratic values of equity, tolerance, pluralism, freedom of expression, the rule of law, and respect for civil and human rights have comparable Islamic values and cite *surahs* from the Holy Quran to demonstrate this. It structures its programs on thematic pillars such as peace, state-building, governance reform, education, women's empowerment, religious and political moderation, and civil society development.

In fostering a culture of moderation, *Wasatia* welcomes the day when Palestinian children no longer are exposed to a literature of incitement, hate and violence, and instead grow up in a rich culture where they can co-exist in peace, prosperity and harmony. Towards this end, *Wasatia* is attracting the moderate majority. It aims to bridge the gap between two civilizations - between the two civilizations based on the Christian Bible and the Jewish Torah and the civilization based on the Quran.

Wasatia in Palestine is not about the dialogue taking place in other Islamic countries between the Islamists and the secularists on the relation of state and religion. Palestinians are paying little attention to the call by Islamists for an exclusive Islamic state formed on the foundations of the *khilafa* since it does not provide the people with a moderate democratic state that would meet the conditions of the modern globalized world.

Islam as a civilization is inclusive and tolerant, far from the closed and rigid ideas that the notion of a religious state invokes. Nor would an exclusive secular state provide the kind of political system required by the conditions of a multi-religious Palestinian community. Thus the

Wasatia debate which Wasatia stirs among Palestinians is not over the idea of a secular order versus a religious state, nor is it about the role of *sharia* in society, but is rather about where do Islam stand versus Jews and Christians and what type of relationship should they have.

In Palestine, there is multi-varied elite, a combination of those who studied in Western Europe and the United States, those who studied in Arab universities such as Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and those who studied in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Block. Secularism bonds them together and unifies them against religious fundamentalists. However, while secular and liberal ideas join them together, these same ideas separate them from the masses that are deeply attached and committed to Islam. While the Palestinian elite read Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Locke, Nietzsche, Marx, Lenin, Guevara, etc., the Palestinian masses read the Holy Quran, the *sira* [life] of the Prophet, the teachings of the Islamic caliphs and thinkers. Even the elites have a strong attachment to Islam.

THE PILLARS OF WASATIA

The following constitute the main pillars of Wasatia.

1. UNITY

- *{Hold fast, all together, by the Rope which God (stretches out for you), and do not be divided among yourselves. Remember with gratitude God's favour to you; for you*

were enemies, and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His grace you became kinfolk.} [Al Imran Surah; verse 103]

- *{“Obey God and His apostle and do not dispute with one another, lest you lose courage and your resolve weaken.”}* [The Spoils Surah; verses 46]

2. FREEDOM OF THE FAITH

The Holy Quran confirms religious freedom and calls for its establishment on a foundation of Conviction and free will in a number of its verses such as:

- *{“Say: Unbelievers, I do not serve what you worship, nor do you serve what I worship...You have your own religion, and I have mine.”}* [Unbelievers Surah; verses 1 & 6]
- *{“Had your Lord pleased, all the people of the earth would have believed in Him. Would you then force faith upon men?”}* [Jonah Surah; verse 99]
- *{“Say: This is the truth from your Lord. Let him who will, believe in it, and him who will, deny it.”}* [Cave Surah; verse 29]
- *“There shall be no compulsion in religion. True guidance is now distinct from error. He that renounces idol worship and puts faith in God shall grasp a firm handle that will never break. God hears all and knows all.”* (Cow Surah; verse 256)
- *{Among His other signs are the creation of heaven and earth and the diversity of your tongues (variations in your languages) and your colors. Surely there are signs in this for all mankind.}* [Romans Surah; verse 22]
- *{“Had your Lord pleased, He would have united all mankind. But only those whom He has shown mercy will cease to differ. For this end He has created them.”}* [Houd Surah; verse 118].

3. FREEDOM OF DIALOGUE

Islam guarantees the liberty to think, to discuss, and to observe.

- *{“Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation. Reason with them in the most courteous exhortation.”}* [Bee Surah; verse 125]

4. PLURALISM

Islam views the world and humanity as multi-nations, multi-cultures, and, multi-religions. Islam reveres and respects all heavenly religions and calls the faithful to believe in God, His Angels, His Apostles, His Holy Books:

- *{“He has revealed to you the Book with the Truth confirming the scriptures which preceded it. He has already revealed the Torah and the Ingeel (Gospel) before for the guidance of mankind, and the distinction between right and wrong.”}* {Imran Surah; verse 3}
- *{“O mankind! We have indeed created you from one man and one woman, and have made you into various nations and tribes so that you may know one another; indeed the more honorable among you, in the sight of Allah, is one who is more pious among you; indeed Allah is All Knowing, All Aware..”}* {Hujurat Surah; verse 13}
- *{“Had your Lord pleased, He would have united all mankind. But only those whom He has shown mercy will cease to differ. For this end He has created them.”}* [Houd Surah; verse 118].

- *{“Had your Lord pleased, He would have made you one nation.”}* [Table Surah; verse 48].
- *{“Among His other signs are the creation of heaven and earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for all mankind.”}* [Greeks Surah; verse 22]
- *{“Had it been Allah’s will, He could have made them all of one religion.”}* [Shura Surah; verse 8]
- *{“Had He pleased, He would have guided you all aright.”}* [Bee Surah; verse 9]
- *{“We raised an apostle in every nation, proclaiming: “Worship God and avoid false deities. Amongst them were some whom Allah guided, and others destined to go astray.”}* [Bee Surah; verse 36]
- *{“Oh People, We have created you from a male and a female and divided you into nations and tribes that you might get to know one another. The noblest of you in God’s sight is he who fears Him most.”}* [Chambers Surah; verse 13]

5. EQUALITY

Observing the first Islamic community during the early days of Islam, we find a mosaic of people toiling together, praying next to each other, and sharing with each other the responsibilities of running the affairs of the faithful. There was Bilal the Ethiopian who was the first *muezzin* (caller to prayers) in Islam and the first keeper of *beit al-mal* (the treasury); there was Selman the Persian who was the Prophet’s consultant during the Invasion of the Ditch (Gharat al–Khandaq); and there was Sahib the Roman. Islam calls for an unquestionable equality among all believers without consideration to race, color, social status, or

financial ability. In Islam, there is but one scale to judge the faithful: his belief in God and the Apostles as exemplified in word and deed. The Prophet used to repeat: *"People are all equal,"* emphasizing: *"There is no merit for the son of the white over the son of the black except in the degree of faith and doing of the good deed."*

- {*"It was He who created you from a single being. From that being He created his spouse, so that he might find comfort in her."*} [Al A'raf Surah; verse 189]

6. CONSULTATION

Islam calls for the affairs in Muslim society are consultative among the faithful. The Quran affirms:

- {*"Take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs; and when you are resolved, put your trust in God."*} [Al Imran Surah; verse 159]
- {*"And conduct their affairs by mutual consent."*} [Al Shura (Counsel) Surah; verse 38]

Those leading the Islamic *Ummah* (community) are in charge not because they are powerful, wealthy, or popular. In a true Islamic *Ummah*, men leading are those who have shown themselves to be most learned, most faithful, most just, and most compatible. It is only when authoritarian political systems had spread in the Islamic world that the Islamic civilization and Islamic power and influence declined.

7. BROTHERHOOD

The Holy Quran hammers on the notion of brotherhood time after time: the unified origin of man derived from the uniqueness and oneness of the creator.

- {*“The believers are a band of brothers. Make peace among your brothers and fear God, so that you may be shown mercy.”*} [Chambers Surah; verse 10]
- {*Say: God is one, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is His match (equal)!*}[Oneness (Unity) Surah; verses 1- 4]
- {*We have created man from the union of the two sexes, so that We may put him to the proof.*}[Man Surah; verse 2].

Prophet Muhammad felt it so important to stress the spirit of brotherhood and equality that he made it part of his farewell speech. In addressing the Moslem *Ummah* he urged:

"Your God is but one. There is no preference for an Arab over a non-Arab, or a non-Arab over an Arab, or a black over a red or a red over a black but in the faith. Most close to God are those most faithful". He asked: "Did I fulfill my mission to you?" And the people responded: "Yes, indeed, Oh Prophet of God."

**POLITICAL PROGRAM OF WASATIA:
THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE**

Wasatia endorses the Arab Peace Initiative, launched by the Arab Summit Conference held in Beirut on March 28, 2002, which called for a comprehensive peace with Israel, recognition of Israel, and normal relations with all 22 Arab countries, in return for Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories occupied since June 1967.

Beginning in 2006, the Arab Peace Initiative assumed new importance, as Arab states tried again to revive their endeavor. It was endorsed by the Arab League summit that took place in Riyadh in March of 2007: “The Summit reiterated the adherence of all Arab countries to the Arab peace initiative as it was approved by Beirut summit 2002 with all its components based on the international legitimacy resolutions and its principles to end the Arab Israeli conflict and bring about fair and comprehensive peace that achieve security for all countries of the region and enable the Palestinian people to set up there independent state with eastern al-Quds as capital.” Furthermore, it was also endorsed by the 57 member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference

Unfortunately, the major players failed to grasp the potential of the initiative. It was “greeted with a yawn by the Israeli government,”⁴ and received lukewarm welcome by the United States and the European Union. When the policymakers in these nations initially read the translated version of the initiative as circulated by Reuters, they treated it as another official Arab summit communiqué. Israeli response was that “there was nothing new in the resolutions” at the summit. Lost in the translation in both the Hebrew version and the

⁴ Henry Siegman, senior fellow at the U. S. Council on Foreign Relations, *New York Times*, 21 February 2002.

English version were the hidden messages and gestures imbedded within the original Arabic text as well as the soft language and willingness to accommodate which constituted a marked departure from earlier Arab summit communiqués.

It is essential to shed light on the neglected linguistic, cultural, psychic, and religious dimensions of this initiative peace by attempting to decipher the messages the Arab leaders may have wanted to send to the Israeli government and public, to the Arab masses, and to the international public opinion. There is a big departure in the terminology used in this peace proposal with words and phrases used in previous Arab summit communiqués.

In seeking the motivation behind the initiative, one can detect the Arab leaders' deep concern with the spreading political and religious radicalism around the globe in general and in the Arab and Moslem world in particular. The questions facing the drafters of the Arab peace initiative were: How to draft an initiative that would be acceptable to the Israeli public as well as the Arab masses and the Palestinian people? Which issues should the initiative include and which ones it should ignore? How detailed should it be?

Here the Arab leaders decided to hold the rod from the middle, not to send too soft a message nor too hard; the first would antagonize the Arab masses while the second would antagonize the Israeli public. In opting for this course, they reflected an important tenant in Islam, namely *wasatia* as reflected by the Holy Quran as it says: {And We have created you a mid-ground nation (*Ummattan Wassatan*).} (Al-Baqrah Surah, verse 143) A similar vision was reflected in Judaism and

Christianity: “The Torah may be likened to two paths, one of fire, the other of snow. Turn in one direction, and you will die of heat: turn to the other and you die of the cold. What should you do? Walk in the middle.” [Talmud: Hagigah, 2:1]“Let your moderation be known unto all men.” [Philippians 4:5].

Linguistically, the Arab Peace Initiative represents a big leap from previous Arab Summits. The First Arab Summit of 1964 convened in Cairo, used harsh language, calling for the “*liberation of Palestine from Zionist colonialism by military force and the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland*”. The Second Arab Summit held in Alexandria, early September 1964, set Israel’s destruction high on Arab national agenda affirming: “*The Council was unanimous in defining national objectives for the liberation of Palestine from Zionist colonialism...; The Council stressed the necessity of utilizing all Arab potentialities, and the mobilization of their resources and capabilities, in order to counter the challenge of colonialism and Zionism as well as Israel's continued aggressive policies and its insistence on denying the rights of the Arabs of Palestine to their homeland; the Council adopted resolutions for the implementation of Arab plans, especially in the technical and military fields; The Council welcomed the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization to consolidate the Palestine Entity, and as a vanguard for the collective Arab struggle for the liberation of Palestine*”. The Khartoum Arab Summit Conference of 1967, formulated the Arab position that underlay the official policies of Arab states with its three famous no’s: “*No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it, and insistence on the rights of the Palestinian*

people in their own country.” This reflected the same policy followed, officially, since the 1949 armistice negotiations.

Compared to traditional policy, the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 carries innovative approach to resolving the conflict, calling for the opening of a new chapter in the history of Arab - Israeli relations. The Arab Peace Initiative is important not only for what it says and the language it opts to say it, but also, for how it says it and how it sanitizes what it says. For instance, it requests from Israel to reconsider her policies.” Here, the communiqué uses the word “*yatlub*” which means ‘requests’ - a soft courteous term as opposed to ‘*yutaleb* / to demand.’

The Council] requests from Israel to reconsider her policies and to incline to peace declaring that just peace is her strategic option too.”) Here, the communiqué uses the Arabic word “*yatlub*” which means ‘requests’ - a soft courteous term as opposed to ‘*yutaleb* / to demand.’

On the religious dimension, the communiqué calls upon Israel: “to incline to peace/ to lean towards peace” (“*تجنح للسلم*”). This phrase was translated in English and Hebrew as follows: “Requests Israel to reconsider its policies and *declare that a just peace* is its strategic option as well...” Here, the Islamic religious connotation of the phrase is lost in translation when the phrase “to incline to peace” was dropped. The expression “to incline to peace” is extracted from a verse in the Holy Quran which reads: “*But if the enemy inclines towards*

peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah."
(Anfal Surah, Verse 60)⁵

Similar to late President Yasser Arafat who recited the exact verse from the Holy Quran when he opted for the road of peace and signed the Oslo Accords in 1993 to win the support of the Arab and Palestinian masses, the Arab Summit used this particular verse to appeal to the religious inclination among the Arab and Moslem masses.

On the religious dimension, the Arab Summit in an effort to win Moslem support, assured that should Israel "inclined to peace" then it is the religious duty and responsibility for Moslems to reciprocate positively as instructed by Allah All Mighty to do so. It was a smart move to mitigate the opposition of Moslem to a peace treaty with Israel. Many Moslems have been adhering to the following verse in the war against Israel and the United States: "*Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors.*" [Al-Baqara Sura; verse 190]

Jerusalem. When mentioned in the Summit communiqué in the context of the capitol of the Palestinian state, "Jerusalem" is followed by the adjective "East". For the first time, the summit is using the terminology, "East Jerusalem" ("القدس الشرقية"), rather than the term it used before: 'Jerusalem'; 'Arab Jerusalem'; Venerable Jerusalem'

⁵ The full text of the two verses is: "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly. **61.** But if the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah. for He is One that heareth and knoweth (all things)"

(القدس الشريف), referring to both East and West Jerusalem as well as the Old City and its Moslem, Armenian, Christian, and Jewish quarters. Here, the Arab summit is making a diplomatic offer: "Lets share the cake" - East (for the Arabs) and West (for the Israelis). The implication is that since Jewish forces occupied West Jerusalem in defiance of UN Partition Resolution of 1947, and occupied and annexed East Jerusalem in 1967 in defiance of international law, Israeli sovereignty on both East and West Jerusalem is illegal according to international law and is considered as **de facto** occupation of the city rather than **de jure** presence. The Arab Summit for the first time is offering Israel, 'withdraw from East Jerusalem and we will concede to you sovereignty over West Jerusalem making it **de jure** rather than **de facto**. This would legalize Israeli declaration of West Jerusalem as its capital and would remove all hindrances and obstacles facing the transfer of foreign embassies (as well as US embassy) from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; a goal Israel has been trying hard to achieve since 1949.

Refugees. Regarding the Palestinian Refugee Problem, the Arab Peace Initiative states: "Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194," departing from the text of previous communiqués which insisted on demanding the return of all refugees to their homeland. In previous Arab summit communiqués, Previous summits asserts the right of return as a must condition and that a solution for the refugee problem must be based on the right of return. Moreover, Israel was blamed for the creation of the refugee problem and thus bears full responsibility in resolving it. It left to negotiations how many refugees were to "return" to Israel and

how many were to return to the Palestinian state to be created. The difference is that much less emphasis was placed on the right of return paramount in the refugee issue. A similar plan was offered by Arab states at the armistice negotiations in 1949. The number of refugees to be returned is not specified. A section reads, “Assures the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries.” This clause indicates that full return of the refugees and the literal implementation of return are not contemplated. UN General Assembly resolution 194 asserts the right of Palestinian refugees who are willing to live in peace with their neighbors to return to Israel. UN Security Council Resolution 242, passed in 1967, calls for Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in the war of June 1967, but does not specify "all territories."

Force. In direct contradiction to the principle raised by Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser: “What has been usurped by force, would not be regained except through force, ما أخذ بالقوة لا يسترد الا بالقوة”, the Arab Peace Initiative discards the use of force affirming “the conviction of the Arab countries that a military solution to the conflict will not achieve peace.” This gives much assurance regarding Israeli security concerns.

What are the rewards the Arab leaders offer Israel in return for peace? The Arab Peace Initiative states that the Arab countries offer the following:

-
- (1) **End of Conflict:** *Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended;*
-

- (2) **Peace:** *Enter into a peace agreement with Israel,*
 - (3) **Security:** *Provide security for Israel;*
 - (4) **Normalization:** *Establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.*
-

In recent times, the Israelis began to warm up for the initiative. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced: "I value this initiative. I acknowledge its importance, and I highly appreciate its contribution. I have no doubt that we will continue to refer to it in the course of the negotiations between us and the Palestinian leadership."⁶ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that the Arab peace initiative could help reach a regional peace agreement. "We appreciate the efforts by Arab states to advance the peace initiative," Netanyahu stated, "If these proposals are not final, they can help create an atmosphere in which a comprehensive peace can be reached."⁷

In an attempt to acquaint the Israeli public with the initiative and to promote Israeli interest in the initiative, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, in November 2008, placed advertisements in several Israeli newspapers. These full-page advertisements were published in Hebrew in four Israeli newspapers. The text of the advertisement read: "Fifty-seven Arab and Islamic countries will

⁶ *Ha'aretz*, 28 November 2007 [English Edition]

⁷ *Ha'aretz*, 23 July 2007 [Reported by Xinhua]

establish diplomatic ties and normal relations with Israel in return for a full peace agreement and an end to the occupation."

In ignoring the Arab Peace initiative, the United States, the European Union, and Israel, undermined tremendously the powers of moderation in the Arab world, creating a vacuum which religious and political radicalism was quick to fill. Rejecting this proposal left the flanks of the moderate Arab camp (led by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan) exposed while bolstering the radical camp (led by Iran and Syria, along with their juniors Hamas and Hizbullah).

On the other hand, the fruits of the Arab Peace Initiative are peace, security, normalization, and prosperity not only for Israel but also for the peoples of the region. It puts an end to the slogan, "Us or them," promoting the idea, "Us and Them." It is not a 'take it or leave it' offer, but rather, "Let us make a deal. I am showing you my cards, show me yours." All issues are laid on the table for negotiations. The Arab masses as well as the Palestinian people may be more receptive for an Arab initiative than a western initiative, even if the second would be more generous. No doubt, a peace treaty with the Arab states would guarantee for Israel acceptance as a neighborly Jewish state not only by the Arab and Islamic governments but also by the Arab, Moslem and peace-loving masses as well.

.....

VII. Conclusions

[*Fear not the path of truth for the lack of people walking on it.*”
Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib]

No doubt, there will be no peace in the world unless there is peace among the religions; and there will be no peace among the religions until moderation dominates people's behavior. Scholars and religious leaders are urged to promote moderation, coexistence, and tolerance within their communities. It is aspired that *Wasatia* will eventually become the voice of the silent majority of Moslems, as well as, Christians and Jews. We are planting those seeds today so that the younger generations may reap a better future.

In adopting this approach, the Moslem community are adhering more to the message of Islam than to the interpretation of the so-called faithful. The gap is and has always been very wide between the song and the singer; Islam being a peaceful religious ideology, while the *muezzin* in the mosque being a radical zealot.

The Moslem *Ummah* from their early history, have been treading a mid course in their religious journey being neither radically fanatic nor totally secular. It is time for *wasatia* creed to emerge and rise in the Moslem world that it may guide the Moslem Ummah (community) in its search for the right path. Moslems should always be proud of their moderate Islamic traditional heritage. No one needs to be reminded that it was Islam that passed the torch to shed light in Dark Ages. The goal should not be to focus on problems and conflicts but to search for

ways and means to solve those problems and conflicts. It is not enough to identify the disease but to find the cure. The question that this would raise is: How? What should be done? Here are some suggestions that may enrich our vision.

1. To spread the *Wasatia* creed and to stand up in its defense whenever it is often misunderstood and misinterpreted.
2. To stand up to those exploiting religion for political, social and economic interests.
3. To avoid being selective in our faith, picking only the text we can live with. It has become the fashion of some to pick up verses from the Quran out of context and use them in their attack on the faith, or in order to justify actions religion forbids.
4. To restrain our lust for material pleasures. Civilization should not be equated with money, palaces, cars, property, and worldly belongings. That was the civilization of Sodom and Ghamurah.
5. To cast away the zealous partisanship, the tribal solidarity, fanaticism, racism, bigotry, and intolerance that we at times allow to dominate our thoughts and actions. These are the tendencies which drive man to become the mortal enemy of man.
6. To nourish voluntary community spirit among the young. Youth ought to be trained to think positively and to work for the welfare of the community rather than for the interests of the individual. The “I” culture should dissolve into the “we” culture.
7. To empower women and to support the efforts to remove the glass ceiling of tradition and culture standing in the way of their

advancement and progress. Women should not need male guardian's approval to study, to work, or to travel. 'Honor crimes' should be dealt with as crimes and the perpetrators to be treated as criminals.

8. To design an educational curriculum that would extend from pre-school education to the Tawjihieh. It would educate students in moderation, democracy, world religions, tolerance, and coexistence.
9. To promote the spirit of charity; to help one another and look after each other; the strong give power to the weak; the able give shelter to the feeble; those who have sight lead the blind; the haves cater for the needs of the have-nots. Those who give *zakat* and donate charity should get tax deductions.

In conclusion, we need to remember, peace starts with moderation, peace continues with moderation; and peace is sustained by moderation.

Professor Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi

Wasatia Founder

Education

I studied my elementary and secondary education at the Friends School in Ramallah graduating in 1964. As a Quaker school, it taught me tolerance and coexistence. I remember Dean Farid Tabri, a Christian who studied at Al-Azhar Islamic University in Cairo, reading in the Assembly meetings held twice a week, from the Bible and the Quran. I got my BA in Mass Communication in 1972 from the American University of Beirut where I got involved in radical politics. In 1975 I left Beirut to the United States. In 1976 I got my Masters of Arts degree from the University of Eastern Michigan at Ypsilanti, Michigan. I joined the University of South Carolina graduating with doctorate degree in 1981. I joined the University of Texas at Austin graduating in 1983 with a second doctorate degree.

Family Background

Dajani, a prominent Jerusalemite Palestinian family estimated to be the largest in Palestine, is deeply rooted in the history of Palestine, and especially as residents of the Holy City of Jerusalem. It was entrusted by the “Supreme Gate” of the Ottoman Empire to be the Custodian of Prophet David’s Mausoleum at the Mount of Prophet David-- referred to also as Mount Zion. The family has a very close-knit fabric with the families of Jerusalem and Palestine. Considered an upper middle class

family, its members excelled in many professions, particularly trade activities and were members of chambers of commerce and industry in Palestine and Jordan.

Moderation Experience

Two personal experiences changed my life. When the Arab-Israeli War erupted in June 1967, I was studying at the American University of Beirut and was cut-off from my family in Jerusalem. It was only in 1993 that I was able to return to Jerusalem on a family reunion permit. My father was suffering from cancer and I used to accompany him to the Israeli Ein Karem Hospital. I saw Israeli doctors treating him as a patient and not as an Arab or an enemy. This experience helped me see the human face of the other converting me to become a peace activist believing in “US and THEM” rather than “US or THEM”.

The second experience had to do with my mother. On one Friday afternoon, she asked me and my brother if we would take her for a drive to the beach in Tel Aviv. We left Jerusalem, myself, my brother, and my 16-year old niece with her around four in the afternoon. We had dinner at the Opera building in Tel Aviv. I walked with my niece on the beach. My mother started to have an asthma attack. The inhalers in her bag were empty and pharmacies were closed since it was Sabbath. So we started driving back hoping to arrive in Jerusalem in time for her to use her electric inhaler at home. On the way back she began to faint and I suspect she had a heart attack. We had reached near Ben Gurion Airport and my brother took that exit. As we approached the entrance, I was absolutely sure that the security people would send us away once they know we were Arabs. Surprisingly, they cleared an area near the entrance, and called for medical assistance and in few minutes

ambulances arrived with full team of doctors, nurses, and medical equipment, and for more than two hours they tried to revive my mother. Eventually, they succeeded. They took her in one of the ambulances to a nearby military hospital. On the way to the hospital she died. We left her in the hospital for the night and drove back to Jerusalem. We left Jerusalem four and returned three. On our way back, I kept gazing at her empty seat and thinking of her and of those who tried to save her .

Creating Wasatia

It was in late 2006 during the month of Ramadan. My house used to overlook the Ram Checkpoint. I was standing on the balcony of my office and saw hundreds of Palestinians from the West Bank trying to pass the checkpoint to go to Jerusalem to pray in the Haram al-Sharif and al-Aqsa Mosque. The soldiers at the checkpoint pushed them back and threw tear gas grenades but to no avail. Suddenly, I noticed that things cooled down. A compromise was struck. The Israeli army provided buses that took the people to Jerusalem, held their identity cards, and gave it back to them upon their return. This made me think: Those are moderate religious people. Had they been radical, they would have used violence for media attention. However, they opted to accept a peaceful compromise. Who represents them?

As a result, Wasatia was established on January 1, 2007 and the first annual conference was held on Wednesday, March 21, 2007;

Glossary

- *abd:* servant
- *Ahl al-Kitab:* People of the Book. A term used in the Quran to refer to Jews and Christians who adhere to sacred scriptures such as the Talmud and the Bible. As believers, they hold juridical rights under Islamic law to live as protected people.
- *alim:* learned scholar.
- *Allah:* Arabic term used as the word for God
- *amir:* commander
- *ayat:* Islamic word for verse
- *baqarah:* cow; heifer
- *caliph:* successor; leader of the Muslim community
- *da'wa:* missionary outreach
- *fath:* victory
- *Fatihah:* "The Opening" or the "Exordium".
- *Fatihah Surah:* first surah (chapter) in the Qu'ran, and consists of seven *ayat* (verses) that form a prayer
- *fard:* obligatory
- *fatwa:* legal religious opinion given by a mufti
- *fiqh:* Islamic jurisprudence, the sacred Muslim law.
- *Fundamental Islam:* faith that goes by the word of the Quran; practicing the literal text of the Quran.
- *Fundamentalism:* a word that came from the heart of the Christian religion. It means faith that goes by the word of the Bible.

- *Gharat al-Khandaq*: Ghazwat al-Khandaq or Invasion of the Ditch which took place in 5 AH (March 627 CE). In preparation for the impending attack by the Quraysh army, the Muslims dug a wide defensive trench around Madinah, thus effectively neutralizing the Makkan cavalry.
- *hadith*: tale; documented traditions of the sayings and actions by Prophet Mohammed by his relatives and close companions that guide the behavior of Muslims
- *hajj*: Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca
- *halal*: religiously permitted
- *hanif*: worshipper of God before Revelation referring to Abraham
- *haram*: religiously forbidden
- *hijab*: Muslim female headscarf
- *hijra*: immigration
- *ijmaa'*: consensus of the Muslim community on a public policy that gives it legitimacy
- *ijtihad*: independent rational reasoning by religious scholars or by Muslims generally, used to interpret the meaning of the sacred text of the Quran
- *intifada*: popular uprising
- *imam*: religious leader who leads the Muslim prayers and guides the community
- *iqra'*: recite; read
- *Islam*: submission to God; surrender to the will of God

- *Islamic Law:* complex body of rules and interpretations that spans many centuries and follows different schools and legal codes
- *Jahiliyya:* ‘Time of Ignorance’; unbelieving society which existed before the rise of Islam in Arabia
- *jihad:* holy war Muslims are urged to wage in the service of God in self-defence for their lives, property and freedom. The “Greater Jihad” is any strenuous serious individual effort intellectual, spiritual, physical for the good; used to refer to the internal struggle of the faithful to reform bad habits.
- *Koran/Quran:* the eternal and direct revelation of God, brought by the Archangel Gabriel to the prophet Mohammed
- *lutf:* grace
- *madrassa:* school
- *ma’eda:* table
- *mahdi:* guided one
- *marja’iya:* reference guide
- *masjid:* mosque
- *muezzin:* official at a mosque charged with giving the call to prayer from the top of the minaret five times a day
- *mufti:* Islamic scholar specialized in Islamic law and qualified to issue religious interpretations.
- *mujahidin:* holy warriors
- *muqata’a:* district
- *neqab:* Muslim female face veil
- *qadi:* Muslim judge who administers Islamic laws

- *qiyas*: analogy
- *rasul*: prophet, messenger
- *salaf*: ancestors
- *salat*: prayers Muslims are required to make five times a day
- *sharaf*: honor
- *shari'a*: body of Islamic laws derived from the Holy Quran
- *sheikh*: trained Muslim religious leader
- *shura*: consultation
- *sirat mustaqim*: straight path
- *sunnah*: custom; attitude; way; sayings and deeds of Prophet Mohammed which were documented after his death by his companions
- *surah (Surat)*: Islamic word for chapter
- *tafsir*: explanation and factual interpretation
- *ta'wiil*: symbolic and allegoric interpretation
- *Tawrat*: Torah
- *Ummah*: Muslim community
- *wasat*: center, e.g. center of a circle; middle, e. g. middle of the road
- *Wasatia*: centrism, balance, moderation, middle-ground

ANNEX I:

FINAL RESOLUTIONS:

***The First Wasatia Annual Conference Al-
Al-Bireh, Palestine***

21 March, 2007

“Wasatia: The Spirit of Islam”

Wasatia held its First Annual Conference in the City Hotel, in Al-Bireh, on March 21, 2007. The conference was attended by 40 academicians, educators, journalists, writers, and women leaders among others, who adhered to the Wasatia creed. Wasatia founding conferences was launched on March 21, a day that marks the beginning of spring, a blooming warm season that falls in between the hot summer season and the cold winter season. Springtime is about regeneration. What was hidden, hibernating, or silently waiting bursts forth in glorious affirmation of the beauty and bounty of life. It calls for regenerating that seed of peace that lies encoded in the spirit. The participants endorsed a platform that blended verses from the Holy Quran, extolling the virtues of peace, moderation and tolerance, with calls for a negotiated peace with Israel and seeking creative solutions to the acute economic, social and political crises plaguing Palestinian society. A full day of deliberations on the deteriorating political,

economic, and social conditions confronting the Palestinian society, presented the urgent need to create a centrist moderate movement – Wasatia - to challenge the ills and dangers of extremism in society. In their final communiqué, the participants endorsed the establishment of Wasatia moderate movement that calls for a new vibrant Islamic approach. The goal was to create a culture of tolerance, understanding, and dialogue that would yield better appreciation of Islam as a religion and a way of life.

ANNEX II:

FINAL RESOLUTIONS:

The Second Wasatia Annual Conference
Al-Bireh, Palestine

21 March, 2008

“Wasatia: From Theory to Practice”

Wasatia held its Second Annual Conference under the title: “Wasatia from Theory to Practice,” in the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, Al-Bireh, on March 21, 2008. The conference was attended by 80 religious leaders, educators, journalists, ngo members, among others, who adhered to the Wasatia creed. Following a day of deliberations on the present status of the Palestinian society and the conditions of the Palestinian people, as well as the role of the Wasatia approach in dealing with the present deepening crisis, radicalism, and extremism, which necessitates that those who are devout for the welfare of the country to unify their efforts to activate the national agenda and to design national strategies and practical plans and programs that would support the connectivity between the components of wasatia thinking offering hope to a bright future. In the light of this, and having reviewed the research papers presented in the conference and listening to the discussions that it generated, the participants have decided to adopt the following resolutions and recommendations.

1. To affirm that the culture of Wasatia is the shield of the nation and its firm fortress.
2. To have the ministries, institutions and agencies of the Palestinian Authority adopt, practice, and promote the Wasatia values and principles of accountability, transparency, justice, and balance, making it the focal of Palestinian life.
3. To affirm the principle of connecting together the civic society with the wasatia bondage.
4. To promote the meaning of Wasatia and ways of practicing it through workshops, lectures, and seminars.
5. To develop the wasatia website to spread the ideas of wasatia in Palestine and abroad.
6. To publish books, pamphlets, and brochures to disseminate information about wasatia among Palestinians.
7. To establish a resource library that would include books, articles, documents, and research papers dealing with the topic of wasatia.
8. To build a network of all organizations which believe in the wasatia creed to cooperate together and support each other.
9. To strive making the wasatia becomes an integral part of the Palestinian educational curriculum.
10. To cooperate with other parties, organizations, initiatives, and popular movements, to map a national strategy based on the wasatia approach.
11. To affirm the need to continue the dialogue with the other heavenly religions, to bring more understanding and cooperation.

12. To approach the Prime Minister to adopt an obligatory university course on wasatia and have a textbook written for that purpose by experts in the field.

13. To support the cause of women and help her affirm her rights in society in equality with men.

14. To create wasatia clubs for children and youth to protect them from street vices.

15. To use the media, - newspaper, radio, television, internet – to spread the values of Wasatia among Palestinians.

The participants value much the financial support offered by the Conrad Adenauer Stiftung that made this conference possible.

Voted unanimously by all participants.

ANNEX III:
FINAL RESOLUTIONS
The Third Wasatia Annual Conference
Al-Bireh, Palestine
21 March 2009
“ Diversity and Plurality in Unity ”

The Third Annual Wasatia Conference brought together 180 Islamic religious leaders from several West Bank towns, local community leaders, teachers, former prisoners in Israeli jails, women, intellectuals, and youth. They endorsed a platform that blends verses from the Quran, extolling the virtues of moderation and tolerance, with calls for a negotiated peace with Israel and solutions to the acute economic, social and political crises plaguing Palestinian society. They called for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital. They affirmed that Wasatia will spend the next few years building itself as a movement, undertaking voluntary work, creating new jobs and economic opportunities.

1. To disseminate the “Wasatia Culture” in the Palestinian society. A citizen is not born moderate but becomes so through education, guidance, and community practice.
2. To call for the development of the guidance and educational forums and institutions to improve the political, religious, cultural, and media addresses and messages.

3. To call for taking legal measures to control political extremism, religious radicalism, and pulpit incitement, and to make those practicing it legally liable. Moreover, to demand the issuance of laws to hold those inciters accountable.
4. To activate the common denominators in the Palestinian society, whether among religions, ideologies, or political affiliations.
5. To hold Wasatia cultural seminars and workshops for mosque preachers, school teachers, and educators in Wasatia topics such as moderation in Islam, coexistence, community consultation, tolerance, forgiveness, unity, dialogue, and the acceptance of diversity and differences.
6. To have moderation become part of our daily practices, particularly in moderating stands towards the other who is different in thought and religion.
7. To strive for the development of the educational curriculum, and the renewal of the religious oratory to include the Wasatia creed.
8. To fortify the values of citizenship, love of the nation, voluntary community services and to promote it above other tribal, racial, and ideological affiliations.
9. To create a wasatia library that includes a comprehensive collection of books and articles dealing with Wasatia and related topics.
10. To collect funds to create “Kids Clubs” in the poor and marginalized districts in Palestine.
11. To adopt a plan to distribute the Wasatia publications to mosques, schools, and libraries.
12. To contact other Wasatia movements in the Arab and foreign communities and coordinate work with them.
13. To send a statement on behalf of Wasatia to President Barack Obama to include “Wasatia and Moderation” in addition to other values such as democracy as an essential pillar in US foreign policy.
14. To express deep appreciation for the continued partnership with the Conrad Adenauer Stiftung in support of moderation, democracy, and human rights.

ANNEX IV:

PRESS RELEASE

Palestinian Moslem Group Urge President Obama to Make Moderation a Top Foreign Policy priority

Saturday, March 21, 2009

Al-Bireh, Palestine

Al-Bireh, Palestine - March 21, 2009 - More than 180 Moslem religious sheiks, scholars, community leaders, and academic experts - including the Chief Islamic Judge of Palestine, Dr. Tayseer Rajab Tamimi, Sheikh Khamis Abdeh, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Professor Mohammed S. Dajani, Founder of Wasatia Initiative in Palestine, Sheikh Ismael Nawahdah, main preacher at al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Dr. Saeed al-Qeek, Chair of Islamic Studies College at al-Quds University, Dr. Barakat Fawzi, Director of School Curriculum at Ministry of Educations, and Head Judges of Islamic Courts in Palestine, participating in the “Third Annual Islamic Wasatia Conference” held in Ramallah, Palestine, called upon US President Barack Obama to adopt a consistent and credible policy that supports justice and moderation in the Arab and Muslim world.

The conference was organized by Wasatia, a moderate Islamic initiative based in Jerusalem. “Wasatia” is an Arabic term derived from the Holy

Quran meaning moderation, balance and justice. Participants in the conference agreed that the situation on the ground is difficult, that there is too much suffering, and that individuals of good will must find new ways to build for a better future.

In this spirit, they agreed to write an open letter to President Obama to call upon him to make supporting moderation and its advocates and proponents in the Middle East a top foreign policy priority, particularly, in Israel and Palestine. They urged President Obama to combine moderation with democracy as the twin pillars of American policy foreign policy.

The conference called upon President Obama to use US considerable diplomatic and economic leverage to spread the culture of moderation and justice in the region.

Because of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a growing tendency among both Palestinians and Israelis to move away from the middle road to radicalism and extremism. This has catastrophic results—as the world has recently witnessed with the violent escalation which resulted in derailing the peace process further and further.

The conferees lauded the President's initial efforts to reach out to the Arab and Muslim world. At the same time, they cautioned that the U.S. must demonstrate its commitment to promote moderation and justice through tangible policy implementation on the ground.

The range of leaders in the Palestinian community participating in this conference demonstrated strong support across the ideological spectrum for a renewed commitment to initiatives that encourage moderation. To President Obama, they say:

“From your days as a community organizer in Chicago, you understand the crucial role that religious leaders and institutions play in the slow hard fight for positive social change. Here in Palestine, we think highly of the peaceful struggle of Martin Luther King to achieve the goals of the Civil Rights Movement in America. We have watched your campaign and your inauguration with great enthusiasm and even with hope. We, too, need change. As you turn your attention to this troubled region, please give support to moderate Islamic leaders, moderate Islamic initiatives, and moderate Islamic groups. As people of faith, we respect the dignity of all human beings: we are ready to work with you to build a better future for our children, and for our communities.”

Annex V: Hanukkah Light of Courage

Hanukkah Light of Courage 2008

By Rabbi John Friedman and Aliza Becker

[As American Jews prepare for Hanukkah this year, there is reawakened hope for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Throughout the last 8 years of dwindling faith that such peace was possible, the 8 days of Hanukkah have helped sustain us. Each, night, we watch the candles spread light across great darkness, and are reminded that by joining all of our courageous efforts together, our dreams are achievable.

In the coming year, as we stand behind U.S. efforts to broker a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we will stand on the work of those who are paving the way. May the lights of Hanukkah rekindle our faith in acts of valor, and may that faith fill us with courage to work for peace for the Jewish people, for the Palestinian people, and for all humanity.

Light one candle for Wasatia

"Wasatia", meaning "moderation" or "balance" or "justice" in Arabic, is a new Palestinian Islamic initiative, which aims to reclaim the center neglected by extremist fundamentalist Islamic groups. Their founding platform extols the virtues of moderation and tolerance and includes, "calls for a negotiated two-state peace with Israel and solutions to the acute economic, social and political crises plaguing Palestinian society." In response to Muslim extremism, Wasatia counters: "Charity and volunteerism -- this is Islam."]

Annex VI: Islam in Our Times

ISLAM IN OUR TIMES

A Determined Moslem Moderate Emerges from the Shadows

Zeina M. Barakat

CROSSCURRENTS (SUMMER 2008): 221-223.

Before announcing the launching of his Islamic moderate political initiative which he calls “Wasatia” in March 2007, Professor Mohammed Dajani has lived in the shadows of his country’s politics, refraining from assuming any political position within the cadre of the Palestinian Authority. Between 1967 and 1975, he was an active Fatah leader calling for the destruction of Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian state on its rubbles. In 1975, he started his long journey in search for a homeland and identity that took him to England, the United States, Jordan, and eventually two decades later bringing him back to his final destination in Palestine, earning two doctorate degrees on the way and publishing numerous academic books and articles.

As a technical advisor to the Palestinian Authority and professor of political science at Al-Quds University, Dajani kept his distance from the corrupt and autocratic political system that emerged in Palestine in the wake of the Oslo peace process. But over the past few months, he crept into the light as his country moves closer and closer to civil war having been divided into two mini-states, a religious Islamic entity in Gaza led by Hamas moving in the sphere of Iran, and a secular entity in the West Bank led by Fatah and influenced by the United States.

Dismayed at the impact of extremism and radicalism on his society and the growing despair among his people, Dajani pushed toward establishing what he describes as an eagle of hope soaring the skies of Palestine with one wing seeking political and religious moderation,

while the other seeking to usher economic development and prosperity. His initiative called al-Wasatia, a term that literally means moderation, centrism, and mid-ground, and used in the Holy Quran to mean justice and balance, raises as its slogan a verse from Surat al-Baqarat (the Cow Surah, [And We have created you Ummattan Wasattan] a mid-ground nation). “This slogan is extremely powerful in mobilizing the religious masses,” Dajani asserts, “since this is verse 143 of the Cow Surat which contains 286 verses.” As the new movement speeds from recognition to promise to hope, to delivery, it is perhaps natural that its critics pulled out their daggers.

Al-Wasatia critics argue that it would be naive to believe that governments should adopt moderate policies since it is politically known that governments generally adopt policies that serve their best interests. Dajani does not yet have much to show for his eighteen months of activity in spite of all his efforts to get this initiative popularly recognized among the Palestinians. Attempts to register al-Wasatia as a charitable religious organization met with no success so far. Moreover, his efforts to convince the PA Minister of Education to include the moderate values of Wasatia as part of the school curriculum or to persuade the PA Minister of Religious Affairs to have mosque preachers trained on the Islamic middle-ground creed were met with deaf ears. Yet, a slim light of hope had emerged when some religious scholars and leaders took upon themselves to give lectures in universities, to preach in mosques, and to publish articles on Wasatia in the local press.

Wasatia aspires to unleash a surge of egalitarian and democratic passions that will bring the average man into the political arena. Dajani hopes that the coming year will hold more promise as an increasing number of people join his crusade. What may seem little or modest progress by the standards of his critics, counts as a big jump by his standards. A year ago, he argues, Wasatia as a term and a movement was unheard of, now it is on the table and has a political, economic, and social agenda.

His book, *Al-Wasatia, From Theory to Practice*, first published in January 2007, rests on one simple idea: the meaning of life is found in living in moderation—“this is the soul of all religions since the beginning.” The book presents mid-ground and centrism ideas as

portrayed in the holy books as well as articulated by the various religious thinkers and political philosophers. How does this square with the belief of radical Moslems that Islam is “religion of God”? Dajani highlights this interpretation with verses from the Holy Quran which asserts that the faithful would not be good believers until they profess full faith in God, His books, and His apostles with no reservation or distinction among them.

In his Wasatia office located in one of the most congested poor neighborhoods of Jerusalem, the soft-mannered Palestinian scholar appears fully convinced that his message of justice, balance, and moderation will one day reach not only Palestinians in the Occupied Territories but other Moslems around the world.

The political turmoil fueled by Israel’s continued military occupation coupled with the economic deteriorating conditions led many Palestinians to abandon their traditional character of being moderate to espouse radicalism and suicide bombings. But Dajani hopes that the message of Wasatia would bring both Israeli and Palestinian public opinion closer to having more faith in negotiations and dialogue with each realizing that the cake need to be shared not trampled on.

What about the desired Palestinian state: will Wasatia advocate an Islamic caliphate or a secular political system that calls for the separation of state and religion similar to that of the United States? True to the call, Wasatia calls for a mid-course, Dajani asserts. It wants to follow the American tradition of protecting religion from the arbitrary power of the state, while at the same time, adheres to the European tradition of protecting the state from religious radicalism, conservatism, fanaticism, and fundamentalism. Here, Dajani maintains that the Palestinians neither share the American sense of deep distrust for government (nearly seven out of ten Americans believe that they cannot trust the government to do the right thing most of the time), nor the European sense of deep distrust of religion. In contrast, the Palestinians, Dajani argues, have trust in both state and religion and as such favor a formula of coexistence between them. For that end, Wasatia seeks to find a happy medium where the state has laws facilitating freedom of religion, and religion

do not impose on the state its *shari'a* laws and restrictions as advocated by those with a radical religious bent. In a future state, Wasatia will work to strike a balance between the American constitutional democracy on the one hand, and the European parliamentary democracies on the other.

As promised, Dajani is striving to deliver a real departure from all other Palestinian religious parties and organizations. He calls for a balance between rationality and emotions to end the cycle of conflict and violence that marred the past. "When I question the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel, one of my intentions is to spare the younger generation the experience of growing up as Moslem minority in a Jewish state. Rather, I would like our children experience growing up as a majority in a Palestinian state. This would greatly enrich their lives," he asserts. His message to the people is simple, "Let's not let the heavy burdens of the past bury the promises of the future. Let's adhere by God's call for justice, tolerance, freedom of religion, acceptance of the other, that the next generation may live in peace and harmony."

Dajani maintains that the Palestinians must take the bitter pill that Israel as a Jewish state is "here to stay," on the other side, the Israelis must also take the bitter pill to make them understand that the creation of the Palestinian state is an essential need to fulfill the quest for Palestinian identity. "The longer the Israeli occupation continues and Palestinian demands remain unaddressed, the more the ground continues to remain fertile for radicalism and fanaticism. Both Israelis and Palestinians, known for being two intelligent people of learning and culture, must have realized those simple facts."

The question that remains to be seen: Will the Palestinian voters in the next elections use their electoral power to evict those in power and replace them with a new centrist leadership?⁸ For the sake of the Palestinian people let us hope so.

⁸ The following organizations have taken part in 2006 Legislative Council of the

National Authority elections in the Palestinian Territories:

a) Secular Movements:

1. Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Al-Jabhah al-Dimuqratiyah Li-Tahrir Filastin)
2. National Palestinian Liberation Movement (Fatah) (Harakat al-Tahrâr al-Filistini)

ANNEX VII: Wasatia Quotes

- “Nothing to excess.” Anacharsis
- “The inseparable companion to wisdom.” Charles Colton
- “The noblest gift of Heaven.” Euripides
- “The middle road.” Ovid
- “Abstaining from indulgence.” Aristotle
- “The golden mean.” Horace
- “Temperance knows that the best measure of the appetite is not what you want to take, but what you ought to take.” Seneca
- “Moderation in the things that are good and total abstinence from the things that are bad.” Frances Willard
- “Fortify yourself with moderation; for this is an impregnable fortress;” Tacitus (55-120)
- “Candor and generosity, unless tempered by due moderation, leads to ruin;” [Epictetus (60 A.D.)]
- “Moderation is best, and to avoid all extremes.” [Plutarch (46-120 A.D.)]

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3. Palestine Democratic Union , (FiDA) (al-Ittihad al-Dimuqrati al-Filastini)
 4. Palestinian National Initiative (al-Mubadara al-Wataniya al-Filistiniyya)
 5. Palestinian People's Party (Hizb al-Sha'b al-Filastini)
 6. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (Al-Jabhah al-sha'abiyah Li-Tahrir Filastin)

b) Religious Parties

1. The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) (Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyah)

- “Nothing is more precious than light, yet too much of it is blinding.” [Joseph Delmedigo]
- “Observe moderation. In all, the fitting season is best.” [Hesiod (720 B.C.) Works and Days, line 287]
- “Be not too zealous; moderation is best in all things.” [Theognis (570-490 B.C.)]
- “Moderation, the noblest gift of Heaven.” Euripides (484-406 B.C.) Medea, Line 636.
- “The virtue of justice consists in moderation, as regulated by wisdom.” Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)
- “In everything the middle course is best: all things in excess bring trouble to men.” Plautus (254-184 B.C.)
- “The heart is great which shows moderation in the midst of prosperity”. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (5 B.C.-65 A.D.)
- “Everything that exceeds the bounds of moderation has an unstable foundation.” Seneca (8 B.C.-65 A.D.)
- “Power exercised with violence has seldom been of long duration, but temper and moderation generally produce permanence in all things.” Seneca(8 B.C.-65 A.D.)
- “Avoid extremes.” Benjamin Franklin (1706-1757)
- • “Water, taken in moderation, cannot hurt anybody.” Mark Twain(1835-1910)

- “A wise man is superior to any insults which can be put upon him, and the best reply to unseemly behavior is patience and moderation.” Moliere (1622-1673)
- “The spirit of moderation should also be the spirit of the lawgiver.” Charles de Montesquieu (1689-1755)
- “Moderation is commonly firm, and firmness is commonly successful.” Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)
- “Moderation in temper is always a virtue.” Thomas Paine, (1737-1809) in *The Rights of Man* (1792)
- “Only actions give life strength; only moderation gives it charm.” Jean Paul (1763-1825)
- “Moderation is the center wherein all philosophies, both human and divine, meet.” Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)
- “The choicest pleasures of life lie within the ring of moderation.” Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)
- “My experience through life has convinced me that moderation and temperance in all things are commendable and beneficial.” Robert E. Lee (1807-1870)
- “Be moderate in everything, including moderation.” Horace Porter (1837-1921)
- “Moderation is the key of lasting enjoyment.” Hosea Ballou.
- “I believe in moderation in all things, including moderation.” J. F. Carter

- “The true boundary of man is moderation. When once we pass that pale, our guardian angel quits his charge of us.” Owen Feltham.
- “In moderating, not in satisfying desires, lies peace.” Reginald Heber
- “We have followed a path of moderation, development is our priority, national unity, good community relations, Muslims and non Muslims, this is what has given us the advantage.” Abdullah A. Badawi
- “America is a model of force and freedom and moderation - with all the coarseness and rudeness of its people.” Lord Byron
- “Never go to excess, but let moderation be your guide.” Marcus Tullius Cicero
- “Moderation is the inseparable companion of wisdom, but with it genius has not even a nodding acquaintance.” Charles Caleb Colton.
- “In order to grow old, you have to experience everything, but in moderation” Compay Segundo (1907-2003)
- “Moderation is part of faith, so those who accuse Muslim schools of fostering fanaticism should learn a bit more about Islam.” Cat Stevens (1948-.....)
- “I think we just have to make sure we do things in moderation.” Lynn Swann (1952-.....)
- “Moderation is the key.” Leif Garrett.” (1961-.....)

- “Everything should be done with moderation and using common sense.” Eartha Kitt (1927-.....)
- “Everything in moderation even moderation.” Daniel Moses (1969-.....)
- "Blessed are the flexible for they cannot be bent out of shape." (Anonymous)
- “Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation.” Bahá'u'lláh (1817 - 1892)
- “It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence.” Bahá'u'lláh (1817 - 1892)
- “In all matters moderation is desirable.” Bahá'u'lláh (1817 - 1892)

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