



The Community of the Middle
Guidance for Balance from Qur'an

Opening Duas. I was preparing for the Eid, and on the Eid I will be talking in another way about the same subject. But today when I looked for my references, it opened right to this, and I said well, I have no choice.

And thus We have made you a community of the center, that you might testify against the people, and that the Messenger might testify against you. And We did not make a change in the direction in which you faced, except to know who followed the Messenger and who turned heel and rejected his guidance. And it was a difficult test except for those whom Allah had guided, and Allah would not permit that your faith be in vain. Truly, Allah is gentle and the Bestower of mercy to all people. Surah al-Baqarah

Allah also says in Surah al-A'raf,

And to Allah belong the most beautiful names, so invoke him by them and leave those who blaspheme his names. They will be paid for what they did. And from amongst them are those who we created as a community that guides by the truth and by it establishes justice.

This term '*ummata wasita*' which is used for those who follow the teachings of Islam and the Prophet Mohammed (sal) means "a nation which is raised on principles of balance." Therefore, because a nation is committed to balance, it is expected to attain to a state of balance in all aspects of life. This means to lead a life in a very comprehensive way. A nation or community justly balanced will attain to this balance by attaining excellence in

all work, study, services, and professional attitudes. Each member of that nation, of that community, will have a sense, an attitude of nobility as they strive for perfection. It means in all circumstances, a person will strive to be just and fulfill purposes, objectives, and goals. All those are based on the reason why we are created, and why the prophets and messengers were sent, and on the quality of the community itself. They have all been described in the Qur'an: **“Those who we created are people who direct others with truth, and dispense justice therewith.”** Here we see stated the ethical and spiritual balance of the community. People are willing to leave their personal interests and desires aside in order to follow the Divine Guidance in their private lives. They are willing to strive to demonstrate to other individuals and other nations, by their actions and their works, how good a life this is. Thus, others will be tempted to follow it.

Wherever there is any difference in any opinion, balance is sought through the Qur'an for a final decision by the best judgment of the wisest of the people. Allah (swt) says for such people to seek balance in their lives: for students, between study and their social life, their home and responsibilities; for people who work, between their work, their home and their spiritual life. People who extend themselves greatly to others in terms of sacrifices by the depth of their spiritual practices. Allah says in Surah al-Imran,

“You are the best of people raised from mankind, enjoining and forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah.” “They believe in Allah and the Last Day. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and they hasten to enact well in all good works, and then join the ranks of the righteous.”

Anybody here have a problem with that? Where are these people? You are more these people. Hardly a nation; barely a community! For those of you who didn't grow up here – as most of you did, whether you started in your twenties or at birth – but before you got here with this concept of life, grew up in some other community of people, and without hearing these words, you still knew the principles.

We look around the world, and either we have to say this is a book of mythology (Shaykh picks up the Qur'an) of some other world, some other place, some mythical drama with "Ahmed Potter," or something; or [do we say] it is the truth? Is this the truth? Nobody has come back from death to testify what the truth of that is, unless you are a Hindu and believe in reincarnation. The person who comes back cannot testify to what it was like when they were gone. If someone comes back, and we seem to have some sense of perpetuity, we also have the sense that this is the truth; albeit, it's not like you can go around the corner and find it manifest. You find it manifest striving in some places like this. That's why Allah says to you, if you really understood the weight of this truth, it would crush mountains, let alone people. Is Allah protecting us by our ignorance?

What is this balance we hear about? As I said last night, we strive for it. We work hard for it. I really hope you study [the *durus* of] last night and the night before. These are characteristics of people and nations who are balanced. A nation brought up with these would be balanced, if we could find one. The very existence of such a nation or community is a demonstration of how humanity could become better. There are things about our nation that have that—there are. You can't find them today very easily. But it's how the nation or community should be developed or sustained for the general good of all humanity. It is not just for the members of the community, especially in the global community. The words "raised from mankind" points to the reality that such a community or nation is raised for the benefit of all people, not just for Muslims, not just for observant people.

Such a nation or community is the very basis of life, the very deepest belief. And I should say that the official responsibility is to invite people to do what's good and to do what's right, and to forbid them by law and by enjoinder from doing wrong: *maruf* and *munkar*. It is to stop them from trying to harm themselves and others. It's hard. If it was

easy, it would happen; because people like ease. They don't like hard things. That's why gummy bears are more popular than hard candies. People like things that are soft, not hard. There is a *hadith* where the Prophet Mohammed (sal) said that his *dīn* or way of life is sincerity / *ikhlas*. It means the very object of religion, of Islam is to wish well for everyone, to work and strive for the goodness and good will of everyone, and to be a benefactor, giver, and fulfiller of the needs of all humanity. That's good! What is the wrong? All kinds of evil, negativity, unethical and immoral behavior.

It's not just the duty of an individual, but the duty of a whole nation of people, of a whole community to act in such a way to as to call other people to good, and encourage people to abstain from injustice, to live with a high ethic, with a deep concern for the well-being of others. And when you fail, you seek forgiveness and repentance, then to try to change. Certainly from a cultural point of view, some of these things would be defined in different ways, but over all, there is a universal understanding of the meaning.

The community is raised with exceptional qualities. It means that individuals, children, adults, have to be raised to bring out those exceptional qualities. They have to be pre-disposed to those qualities to acquire them, and [try to acquire] the ones they don't have. They live a life of balance, and invite others to that goodness in the noble way of life. If we look at history, the nations that failed to maintain balance between their social and cultural life, their spiritual beliefs and their actions, adopted unjust or wrong ways because of their leadership or lack of leadership. We are seeing that today in the world. Then when an intelligent, sensitive leader or person comes along, the power of negativity is so strong the only thing they can say is, "We want to make sure Obama is not re-elected!" Leadership takes some time to understand and develop.

People destroy the balance in their lives. There are a number of nations today that were self-sufficient agriculturally, and they were destroyed by tyrants, tribal wars, genocide, disagreements: Uganda, Congo, Zambia. We could start to name European countries

pretty soon. People adopted unjust ways because they became unbalanced. Human rights and justice weren't considered important. People in power would crush those under them, or who they thought had interests other than theirs: Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia. Through those petty things, tremendous losses took place. There was no question of rights for the poor, or rights for the homeless, or for the hungry: Somalia, Sudan. No question of the rights of children or women: Pakistan, Afghanistan. No rights to live, no rights to talk about rights.

At the other extreme, you have places in the world where the most basic necessities of life are restricted from people, benefits that might accrue to anyone who was in control of the state. Islam looks at any excess as being undesirable; yet, look at the excesses in Iran or Iraq among the leaders, let alone the excesses in this country among the 1%. Any disrespect for any aspect of life is undesirable. You have to respect all forms of life. Forget about the extinction of the whales and plants; forget about global warming. It's only a passing fancy! All human beings live under certain conditions, and those conditions are very important.

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They are good guidelines for balance. One is to respect individual privacy. In the Qur'an, it says, you cannot enter a person's home without their permission. **“O believers! Do not enter other houses than your own until you have approval of the inmates and have wished them peace. This is the best way for you, and it is expected that you will observe it.”** That seems to me to be in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights – unlawful search and seizure. Don't billet soldiers in people's homes. When you enter into anyone's home, even if you are going to your good friend's home, you should knock on the door. If no one answers, and if it's important, you might open the door a little and say, *“Asalaamu aleykum.”* Don't walk in, *“Gee, I wonder if you are in the bathroom. Oh, you are here! Excuse me.”* You must take permission to come in. It's the right of privacy.

Another saying from the Qur'an: **"A person is innocent until they are proven guilty."** Wait, that is not Qur'an; it used to be the law in the United States. It depends on how rich you are. This is a very important clause. **"No one can be imprisoned without right of trial."** I guess we forgot about that one. **"Or taken into custody without proof or evidence against them."** Oh! Boy, have times changed! **"Bring four witnesses to prove their charge."** Don't even have to have witnesses anymore. **"Now that they have not brought witnesses, they, themselves are liars in the sight of Allah,"** Allah says. In the sight of law, all are considered equal no matter what their gender or status in society. You see? Myth! In Surah an-Nūr, Allah says, **"A man guilty of adultery shall not marry any but the woman guilty of the same. They shall not marry unless there is proof."** And the proof is very demanding. The Qur'an declares the sanctity of life. **"Take not life which Allah has made sacred except by the way of justice and law."** It means there can be laws for that, but they must be just.

"Thus does He command you that you may learn wisdom." Wisdom! The wisdom of Sulayman! Remember the dispute over the baby? Solomon said, "Okay we can't agree. We'll cut the baby in half and each takes half the baby." And one woman said, "No, no, let her have the baby." And he knew which one was the mother, then. The sanctity of property is declared. **"Do not eat up your property amongst yourselves by unjust means."** That means stealing, by the way. One cannot slander another. Women are granted equal rights to all men. Thank God we have achieved that in the world—the mythical world! That was a very revolutionary statement at the time. Can you imagine, to grant equal rights to women without any reservation? It's taken a little time... 1,420 some years. But that's just the blink of an eye, right? We might see it by the time your great-great-great-great-great grandchildren, nephews, or nieces are alive.

The Qur'an describes, **"And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them according to what is equitable and just."** Rights against them. Balance. Islam encourages judicious balance in family life. Seek out partners who can uplift you, who

can bring balance into your lives. That doesn't mean people who just tell you what is wrong. "Hey, stupid! Pick up your clothes. Clean the toilet." You notice I didn't say which gender was saying what. That's not what it means. It means with the heart you try to uplift the person. You are forgiving, tolerant, patient, understanding. Everybody has a blind side. The same balance is encouraged in terms of eating, drinking, and other physical things. It is important to be healthy, to be able to serve Allah. What does it mean? It means to carry food to someone else, to move a stone from the path, to be available to help, to be there when someone needs your compassion and mercy. Not to be there to say, "I told you so."

You see the unbalance is everywhere. It has crept into everyone's heart. If you have a little leak in your window, it gets cold in the winter. You don't notice it when the temperature is okay. It seeps in everywhere. We should eat what is pure. We used to try to do that. Live a life of balance and not extremes in terms of food... preach to yourself, preacher! Don't eat anything that is dead, meaning carrion. It doesn't mean eat it while it's walking. Don't drink anything that is intoxicating, or that changes your perception or your reality, even if it has reserveratol in it. These are the ways in which balance is described in Islam, and these are guidelines for the community and the nation. But who is going to get guidance from it? A person who lives a balanced life. We live in a world where if you see one thing wrong with a person, everything is wrong with that person. If you see one thing wrong in a nation, is everything wrong in the nation? If you see one thing that is difficult in Islam, is everything difficult? If you see some hypocritical behavior in Islam, does it make everything hypocrisy? No, but it sure is on the road to it.

There was once a dervish voyaging on a ship at sea. He was asleep. A purse of gold was reported missing on the ship, and everyone on board was searched. Someone pointed to him and said to search the faqir. Sounds like a case before the courts now, where they plant something and search you for it. The anxious owner of the money awakened the faqir. He said, "A handbag of mine is missing on

board. We have searched everyone, and no one has it. So you must have it, and you can't escape! Take off your dervish robe. Strip, so you can be cleared of people's suspicions." Sounds like going through security at the airport, now. "Allah!" cried the dervish. "These vile creatures have accused your servant, accomplished to a degree!"

Since the heart of the dervish was pained by the man's suspicions, the fish all over the sea came from every side of the ship, from the depths of the ocean, and opened their mouths. Each one had a pearl in its mouth. There were multitudes of fish swimming around, each with pearls in their mouths. Each pearl was incredibly valuable. The dervish said to the man, "These are from God, shared by no one else." Soon a number of those pearls were cast down on the ship, and then a throne descended. The dervish sat cross-legged in comfort on that throne, like a king. He rose up high above the ship and called down to them, "Go. Have your ship. Then you won't be plagued by whom you consider a beggar and a thief. And we will see who will be the one who loses by this separation. I'm happy to be paired with Allah and at odds with men, because Allah does not accuse me of being a thief. He does not give me over to the mercy of some informer."

The people looked at him, astonished. They were surrounded by all these pearls on the ship. "Noble sir," they said. "Why has such a high station been vouchsafed for you? How do you deserve this for casting suspicion on faqirs and vexing God for the sake of mean trifles?" "God forbid," he replied. "Rather, it was for reverencing kings that I entertained no dark thoughts against the believers, and no dark thoughts against dervishes. Allah revealed this to you, and you exalted me."

So you see, there is a guideline in this story. This is from the Mathnawi of Jelalludin Rumi. It is not just how we act, but the thoughts we carry around inside of us. When we

need the blessings of the Almighty, they will be there. I guess this brings new meaning to the phrase, “casting pearls before swine.” *Asalaam aleikum.*