## **BOOK REVIEW**

Kamali, Mohammad, Hashim: The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam - The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah

Foreword by Tariq Ramadan

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This work comes from the pen of a mature, seasoned and prolific writer of contemporary Islamic Thought and Practice. With a core specialization in Islamic Law and Jurisprudence, Professor Hashim Kamali always exudes wisdom hat capable of stimulating the mind.

In our contemporary era of chaos, where Islamic Religious Thought has been held to ransom by individuals and groups, both State and Non-State actors parading themselves as the spokespersons for the faith community, this book is opportune. It is a welcome relief to explore one of the core principles of Islamic Thought, one that is often only paid lip service.

In the blurb on the back cover, many eminent scholars from around the globe voice their appreciation of the excellent critical scholarship Kamali always brings to bear on his writings.

In the foreword, Tariq Ramadan's appraisal is profoundly admirable. He says, among other things that:

"Kamali relies on the school of Law as much as the School of *Maqasid* [the higher objectives of Islam] to illustrate that in relation to rules, not only is everything in Islam based on moderation but that the very understanding of the higher objectives of Islam relies on moderation too." [p. viii]

One is tempted to ask a rhetorical question that if the very essence of Islam is rooted in moderation [wasatiyyah], why does Islam (and Muslims) continue to have such bad press? A sincere and sober reflection would reveal that people who claim to subscribe to Islam and call themselves 'Muslims' are part of the problem! The understanding many Muslims have of the core values of Islam leaves much to be desired. This is exactly why Hashim Kamali's book is crucial

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at this time, both for specialists and non-specialists alike, to keep the task of public education going.

Digging deep into the Scriptural Sources and the rich variety of intellectual heritage amongst major scholars of repute, the author reminds the reader of the essential precept in Islam that diversity is always a blessing, and hence no individual human being is the epitome of all Islamic Thought and Life.

The book is divided into two main parts and a total of twenty-three chapters, in addition to an Introduction. Part One focuses on a conceptual analysis and takes up seven chapters, while the second part is made up of fifteen chapters. The seeming 'imbalance' of the two parts has a definite rationale to it. Part two is more concerned with what one might describe as 'the application of the whole principle of *wasatiyyah*'. After all, what is the worth of a principle if it is not properly understood and applied? This ties in very well with the Islamic understanding of 'Faith' [Belief, *Iman*] itself. It must always be applied in real life; otherwise, it is as good as worthless. *Iman* [Faith, Belief] must therefore necessarily be cemented in '*Amal* [practice, action], to produce *Falah* [success] in the hereafter. That is why the Qur'an is replete with reminders about this. [See: 2: 2-3; 61:2-3; 103:3 *et passim*].

The near-universal application of the concept of *wasatiyyah* [moderation] is hammered home right at the beginning, in the introduction. Kamali writes:

"'Moderation' is primarily a moral virtue of relevance not only to personal conduct of individuals but also to the integrity and self-image of communities and nations. Moderation is an aspect, in its Qur'anic projections, of the self-identity and worldview of the Muslim community, or Ummah, and also features prominently in almost all major world religions and civilizations." [p. 1]

This questions the 'state of mutual ignorance' often used to describe the situation of Interfaith Relations. If people of Religious Faith and those of none were to take this perception to heart, this world would be a far better place. The crucial importance of Interfaith (and we must immediately add Intra-faith) relations and Intercivilizational Dialogue have become even more pertinent in our time. It is the dissonance between the concept and its application which is the worrying element in the whole scenario.

Kamali cites a statement from Abd al-Latif al-Farfur reflecting on the importance of *wasatiyyah* for Muslim Unity. This is where intra-faith dialogue becomes critical because, without that, Interfaith dialogue and the subsequent global-level dialogue of civilizations would be more than impossible to uphold.

In the conceptual analysis, the author cites numerous passages from the Qur'an and the Hadith and the works of classical and contemporary Scholars to

take the reader through a well-crafted section. With his usual characteristic desire for constant clarification, Kamali boldly points out that: "...moderation...does not imply any compromise on religious principles, nor on basic religious duties, in order to please or appease others." [p. 14] He then states: "On the contrary, wasatiyyah means confidence, right balancing and justice." [p. 14]

Here, he is at pains to disassociate himself from those who link 'moderation' to appearement and a lop-sided application of fundamental religious precepts.

With copious references to the Qur'an, the Hadith and the opinions of mainstream Muslim Exegetical Scholars of yore, Kamali takes the reader on a real journey, slowly but methodically exploring the implications of *wasatiyyah*.

The book, unlike many others, does not leave one wondering whether there have been any modern, contemporary deliberations on the subject. Many a time, one reads a piece with opinions so distanced in history that one wonders whether these classical reflections have much relevance for the modern world. Kamali, however, taps into the wisdom of recent thinkers like Muhammad Abduh, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Mustafa Kamal al-Tunisi, Muhammad Tahir Ibn 'Ashur, Ahmad al-Raysuni, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and Ibrahim al-Shimri.

The applicability feature in the second part of the book examines many issues *vis a vis wasatiyyah* including: justice, religiosity, *tasawwuf*, the environment, jihad, gender issues, the individual's general character, renewal and reform and the ubiquitous issue of globalisation.

He makes a bold statement thus:

"I believe the Islamic advice of *wasatiyyah* merits attention by the Muslims but also the wider humanity, mainstream media, and world leaders in the midst of a multitude of misinformation depicted and propagated in the name of Islam." [p.235]

The noble ideal that, as human beings on earth we have a 'shared responsibility' to live in peace and harmony is reflected throughout the book and reiterated in the Concluding Chapter, in which Kamali outlines twenty-four clear, specific and attainable goals as recommendations for the world.

Without any shadow of a doubt, this is a timely piece for the whole of humanity, helping it to reclaim its rightful place on earth, as the Creator intended.

Despite the host of technical concepts that abound in the book, the author's commitment to explaining each of them in simple language, makes the work very readable. Both specialists and those without expertise in Islamic Law and Jurisprudence or the Qur'an and Hadith would find it enlivening to read.