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# Leading a Moderate Life: Guidelines from Rūmī's *Mathnawī*\*

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## INTRODUCTION: MODERATION VERSUS EXTREMISM IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

The issue of moderation has become a leading topic in today's political landscape, largely due to the accelerating process of what is generally known as 'Islamic extremism'. As much unrest involves Muslim communities and individuals, the position of Islam with respect to moderation and extremism has been the subject of many debates. It is not within the scope of this essay to elaborate on this issue. However, as Rūmī often gives references to Islamic scripture in his poetry, a brief overview of the position of Islam towards extremism and moderation will serve the purpose of this study.

The Qur'an asserts that the Islamic *ummah* was created as a 'moderate (or middle) nation' that is expected to 'bear witness to the truth before all mankind', while 'the Prophet is a witness' over them (II: 143).<sup>1</sup> It appears that moderation is regarded as a prerequisite for 'witnessing the truth', because a biased mind that is inclined toward an extreme point of view is unable to be objective and balanced. Furthermore, the Qur'an provides

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<sup>1</sup> The *ummah* is introduced as 'a community that keeps an equitable balance between extremes and is realistic in its appreciation of man's nature and possibilities, rejecting both licentiousness and exaggerated asceticism'. On this idea in the Qur'an, see *The Message of the Qur'an*, trans. Muḥammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dal Al-Andalus 1980), p. 30, n. 118. Translations from the Qur'an in this study are largely drawn from *The Glorious Koran*, trans. Marmaduke Pickthall (London: George Allen & Unwin 1976) with some modifications.

practical advice on issues such as spending money in a balanced manner, 'refraining from waste' – for 'the squanderers are the brothers of the devils' (17: 26–27). Moderation is advised even in the case of developing admirable virtues such as helping the needy; 'whenever they spend on others, [they] are neither wasteful nor niggardly, but there is always a just mean between those [two extremes] (XXV: 67). The Prophet Muḥammad laid special emphasis on moderation by repeating three times: 'O people: be moderate, be moderate, be moderate.'<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most famous Ḥadīth, known as the Ḥadīth of Moderation, underlines that 'the "Middle Path" or *via media* is the best and right path' (*khayr al-umūr awsāṭiḥa*) for all Muslim believers to follow.<sup>3</sup> In his multivolume Persian commentary on al-Kalābadhī's (d. 380/990) *Kitāb al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*,<sup>4</sup> Abū Ibrāmīm Mustamlī Bukhārī (d. 434/1042–1043) reported an event where a few groups approached the Prophet, each claiming that its position was the right position. In response to their arguments the Prophet brought their attention to the Ḥadīth of Moderation and encouraged them to take the Middle Path.<sup>5</sup> Another account refers to an event where the Prophet was surrounded by a group of his followers. Using a stick he carved a straight line in the soil toward himself, while the companions were sitting on either side. Pointing to the line he announced: 'Verily my path is the straight one, so follow it' (*Inna hadha sirāṭ-i mustaqīman, fattabi'ūhu*). He then drew several other lines on either side of the main line and added: 'Do not follow other paths that divide and scatter you' for 'the multiple paths are those of the Satan, and the followers would face annihilation.' And in the end the Prophet declared: 'the Middle Path is the right path.'<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) introduced the members of the Prophet Muḥammad's household (*Ahl al-bayt*) as being the best point of reference for people of the Middle Path.<sup>7</sup> In his first sermon after

2 *Yā ayyuḥa al-nās-u 'alaykum bil-qaṣd-i, 'alaykum bil-qaṣd-i, 'alaykum bil-qaṣd-I*; see 'Alā al-Dīn 'Alī al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa al-af'āl* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla 1985), vol. III, p. 28.

3 *Kunūz al-ḥunūz al-ī nūz al-khayr al-khalā'iq*, vol. II, p. 53. The said Ḥadīth has also been recorded as: 'The best of paths is the *via media*' (*Khayr al-umūr awsāṭihā*) in *Jāmi' al-umū*, vol. II, p. 68. Cited in Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Sipihri 1361 A.Hsh./1982), p. 69.

4 Abū Ibrāmīm Mustamlī Bukhārī, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, trans. A.J. Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1935) and frequently reprinted.

5 Ismā'īl Mustamlī Bukhārī, *Sharḥ al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab al-taṣawwuf* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Asāṭir 1363 A.Hsh./1984), p. 459.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Imām 'Alī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, trans. (Arabic into Persian) Seyyed Ja'far Shahīdī, 10th ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī va Farhangī 1376 A.Hsh./1997), aphorism 109, p. 379.

the official allegiance of the people of Medina with him, Imam 'Alī laid stress on the importance of the Middle Path in the following manner: 'Deviating toward right or left is error, and the Middle Path is the right path.'<sup>8</sup> He further elaborates on the matter by referring to any form of extremism as a sign of ignorance.<sup>9</sup> There are numerous references to moderation in thought, mood, and action in various passages of the *Nahj al-Balāghah*. In one passage, for instance, Imām 'Alī reiterates that if one crosses the limits of moderation in reacting to various moods and conditions – such as hope, fear, wealth, poverty, and so on – it will lead one to undesirable results.<sup>10</sup>

The Ḥadīth of Moderation was equally popular among traditional Muslim theologians as among Sufis. Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his *Iḥyā' al-'ulūm al-dīn*<sup>11</sup> and Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654/1256) in his *Mirṣād al-'Ibād*<sup>12</sup> put much emphasis on the said Ḥadīth. Rūmī, in his presentation of moderation, as we shall see, often resorts to the Qur'ān and these traditions of the Prophet to support his own view on the subject of moderation. In his *Seven Sermons (Majālis sab'ah)*, for example, he refers to the Ḥadīth of Moderation, mentioning moderation as the supreme virtue that grants man's heart and spirit protection from all harm.<sup>13</sup> In the *Mathnawī*, although he uses stories that have broad appeal to a general audience in order to relay his message of moderation, his perspective on moderation is far more complex and nuanced. These accounts, which are mostly concentrated in Books II and V, will be the subject of our discussion in the passages that follow.

## INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF MODERATION

Perhaps the most interesting treatment of the subject of moderation in the *Mathnawī* occurs in Book II, where we come across a story about a group of Sufis who take their objection toward the immoderate behaviour of one of their fellow dervishes to the Shaykh of their Order. They criticize the dervish for having three annoying habits: excess in speaking, eating and sleeping:

8 *Al-yamīn-a wa al-shamāl-u maḍallah, wa al-ṭarīq-u al-wuṣṭa hiya al-jāddah*. See *ibid.*, sermon 16, p. 18.

9 'You will not find an ignorant person but at one extreme or the other' (*la-tarā al-jāhila 'illā mufriṭan aw mufarraṭan*). See *ibid.*, aphorism 70, p. 371.

10 *Ibid.*, aphorism 108, pp. 378–79. 11 See Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī*, p. 69.

12 Najm al-Din Rāzī, *Mirṣād al-'Ibād*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn Rīyāhī (Tehran: Shirkat Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī 1347 A.Hsh./1995), p. 454.

13 Mawlānā Jalāl al-Din Rūmī, *Majālis Ṣab'ah (Haft Khaṭābih)*, ed. Tawfiq Subḥānī (Tehran: Kayhān 1365 A.Hsh./1986), pp. 33–34.

In his speech he is long-winded as a bell;  
In his eating he exceeds that of twenty men;

And when he sleeps, he is like the 'Men of the Cave'.<sup>14</sup>  
The Sufis criticized him harshly before the Shaykh.<sup>15</sup>

The Shaykh affirms the validity of their criticism and, resorting to the Prophet's famous Ḥadīth of Moderation, moralizes that adopting the Middle Path is always the best approach to take in all circumstances of life:

Turning toward the dervish, the Shaykh declared: 'Hey!  
On every occasion always take the Middle Way'.<sup>16</sup>

The master then further elaborates on this Ḥadīth and, referring to the four vital humours of the human body that must be kept in balance, discusses the Prophetic tradition's validity in the arena of physical health. According to traditional Islamic medicine based on the Galenic system, the four cardinal humours are phlegm (*balgham*), blood (*dam*), yellow bile (*ṣafrā*), and black bile (*sawdā*).<sup>17</sup> The humours, which were held to affect human personality and behaviour, are referred to by Rūmī in the following couplet from this tale:

If those humours are not kept in harmony  
Sickness will overwhelm you suddenly.<sup>18</sup>

The Shaykh argues that the golden rule for maintaining physical health and well-being is to follow the *via media*, as in fact, the Prophetic tradition, the most authoritative source, always emphasized:

14 Qur'ān, XVIII: 10–11.

15 *Mathnawī*, II: 3509–10 (II: 3524–25). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo. Unless otherwise indicated, the verses cited here and below are from Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Mathnawī of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (Tehran: Nashr-i Butih 1381 A.Hsh/ 2002). The verse numbers following in parentheses refer to Istī'lāmī's edition: Muḥammad Istī'lāmī, *Mathnawī: muqaddimah wa taḥlīl, taṣḥīḥ-i matn bar asās-i nuskhahhā-yi mu'tabar-i Mathnawī, muqāyasah bā chāphā-yi ma'rūf-i Mathnawī, tawḍīḥāt wa ta'līqāt-i jāmi'* wa *fihristhā*, 7th ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zavvār 1384 A.Hsh./2005).

16 *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II: 3511 (II: 3526). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

17 For a good account of this theory, see: Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (New York: HarperCollins 2007).

18 *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II: 3513 (II: 3528). Translation by Mojaddedi in Rumi, *The Masnavi: Book Two*, trans. Javid Mojaddedi (Oxford: OUP 2007).

The Prophet said, ‘The best path’s moderation.’  
A balanced nature leads to the best station.<sup>19</sup>

As we have seen so far in this tale, one person’s so-called ‘immoderate’ behaviour creates a disturbance within his own circle, which in turn presents itself as a concern at the wider social level. The Shaykh, a venerated figure of authority who is accorded a higher spiritual status by the members of the Sufi community, presents the conventional Islamic notion of moderation not only as the right means to maintain social harmony in his group of disciples but also as the best way to ensure psychological balance and to create physiological equipoise in general.

### MODERATION AND CAPACITY

At this juncture of the tale, Rumi carries the argument to another stage using the story of Moses and Khidr. He brings moderation to a new and deeper level, raising the issue of the relation of ‘individual capacity’ or ‘spiritual aptitude’ (*isti’dād*) and relating that to the wider notion of what actually constitutes the true ‘Middle Path.’ The account of Moses’ abortive discipleship of Khidr given in Qur’an XVIII: 60–82, which has been commented on by theologians, philosophers, and Sufis for centuries, is too well-known to be repeated here. Khidr is a mysterious personality in the Qur’an and in the Islamic tradition as a whole. In the mystical literature of many cultures including religious traditions within and without Abrahamic faiths, Khidr is also portrayed as a transcultural figure.<sup>20</sup> In nearly all these accounts, Moses represents finite human reasoning while Khidr represents the advanced mystic who is endowed with ‘esoteric knowledge’ (*‘ilm-i ladunī*).<sup>21</sup> The character of Khidr represents the lore of eternity and

19 *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II: 3512 (II: 3527). Translation by Mojaddedi in *The Masnavi: Book Two*.

20 Irfan Omar has presented, in a concise manner, the various personalities that may be identified with Khidr in Christian and Jewish traditions: Irfan Omar, ‘Khidr in the Islamic Tradition,’ *The Muslim World*, 83/3–4 (1993) (available at: <http://khidr.org/khidr.htm>), accessed 8 May 2016. In the Hindu tradition, for instance, this mysterious personality has been respected as a ‘Prophet, Saint, or Deity’ and is known by various names such as Khwaja Khadir, Pir Badar, and Rāja Kidār. He is revered by both Muslims and Hindus, who pay him homage at his principle shrine on the Indus near Bakhar. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, ‘Khwaja Khadir and the Fountain of Life, in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art,’ in *What is Civilization?* (Cambridge: Golgonooza Press 1989) pp. 157–67.

21 ‘Knowledge by divine inspiration’ (*min ladunī*); see Qur’an, XVIII: 65. Though the name Khidr does not appear in the Qur’an, in this passage where he is referred to as a ‘servant of God’ there is a consensus among scholars of the Qur’an that the said

immortality beyond time and space, paradoxical expressions of poetic inspiration, transcendent wisdom, and esoteric understanding in general.

Both personalities in Rumi's narrative are authoritatively represented and revered here,<sup>22</sup> but even among the two a strong sense of hierarchy is present: Khiḍr is the leader while Moses is the follower. Moses represents a realm wherein doubt and vague suspicions reside, whereas Khiḍr's realm is that of certitudes.<sup>23</sup> Khiḍr warns Moses that if he is to stay in his company he must limit the extent of his presence to that of an observer and a follower, that is, a passive presence; that he shall never question the actions of his master, no matter how wrong those actions may appear. Whereas Moses' ethical evaluations of Khiḍr's actions issue from a rational process derived from legalistic norms based on exoteric Canon Law, Khiḍr exemplifies the esoteric realm where the 'interior reality of things' matter the most and 'judgements are made without any underlying causes; judgements are rather made according to the divine command.'<sup>24</sup>

The dialogue exchanged between Khiḍr and Moses reveals the profound connection between one's spiritual aptitude or capacity, and understanding the inner as well as outer reality of what comprises the 'golden mean' in the performance of any act or deed. Rumi in this respect remarks:

The speech of Moses was in measure, yet in the end,  
It overstepped the words of his good friend.<sup>25</sup>

Moses – a prophet of God – undoubtedly possessed many high moral qualities, but he too exceeded his capacity. He tried to be as patient and

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personality is 'Khiḍr'. See Maḥdāvī Damghānī, 'Khiḍr', in *Encyclopedia of the World of Islam (EWI)* (in Persian), vol. XV, pp. 554–60. For further exposition of this story in the context of Isma'īlism, Sufism, and Rumi's thought, see Leonard Lewisohn, 'From the "Moses of Reason" to the "Khiḍr of the Resurrection": The Oxymoronic Transcendent in Shahrastānī's *Majlis-i maktūb . . . dar Khwarazm*', in *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, ed. Omar Ali-de-Unzaga (London: I.B. Tauris/Institute of Ismaili Studies 2011), pp. 407–33.

22 Different views have been expressed by various scholars about Khiḍr's authoritative status. Some earlier scholars such as Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī (838–923) and Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī have regarded him as a *Nabī* (prophet), while most later writers like Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (1149–1209) and Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr (1301–1373) are of an opposite opinion, regarding Khiḍr merely as a special servant of God 'on whom God had imparted knowledge from His side' (Qur'ān, XVIII: 65), hence accepting him not as a *nabī*, but as a 'saintly friend of God' or *walī*.

23 Lewisohn, 'Oxymoronic Transcendent', *Fortresses of the Intellect*, p. 411.

24 For an analytical elaboration of the subject based on Shahrastānī's *Majlis* see *ibid.*, pp. 411–12.

25 *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II: 3515 (II: 3530). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

quiet as possible, but eventually he transgressed his proper bounds by questioning the actions of his master.<sup>26</sup> Evaluating the speech of Moses in a conventional manner, his words seemed to be entirely reasonable – ‘measured’ and ‘moderate’ – but in the presence of Khiḍr he had obviously crossed the limit and overstepped the bounds of propriety. This is because, as Rumi illustrates elsewhere in the *Mathnawī* in the tale of Daqūqī and the Seven Saints,<sup>27</sup> even the slightest mistakes can have fatal consequences in elevated spiritual domains. In such situations, not being able to hold one’s tongue and restrain oneself can lead to separation from the Beloved; the Shaykh admonishes his disciple:

In temper don’t overtrump your companion;  
—For certain that’ll ultimately cause separation.<sup>28</sup>

As a reprise in verse to the passage in *Surāh al-Kahf* (XVIII: 67) where Khiḍr scolds Moses for his ‘impatience’ with him, the Shaykh then advises the garrulous disciple against using excessive and immoderate speech:

His excessive speech came to Khiḍr as a cause of alienation.  
Khiḍr said: ‘Go! You talk too much; this means separation.’

‘O Moses, you are longwinded, go away,  
Be dumb and blind, if you decide to stay!’<sup>29</sup>

We have already mentioned that moderation is directly related to the issue of individual capacities. Realizing one’s own aptitude or capacity is essential for understanding the meaning of moderation. A moderate act, in other words, is not some predefined, predictable, concrete form of action, but rather an action proportionate and appropriate to one’s physical and spiritual abilities. It is the same with respect to the individual devotee’s relationship to God. The Qur’ān thus informs us that ‘God burdens not any soul but according to its capacity.’<sup>30</sup> It is only with this knowledge that realistic and fair benchmarks can be set to define the boundaries of moderation and assess the proper measurement of specific actions. Rumi elsewhere in the *Mathnawī* expresses this truth as follows:

26 Qur’ān, XVIII: 70–75.

27 *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, III: 1925–2305 (III: 1926–2307).

28 *Ibid.*, II: 3514 (II: 3529). Translation by Leonard Lewisohn.

29 *Ibid.*, II: 3516–17 (II: 3531–32). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo. 30 Qur’ān, II: 286.

Load a beast with a burden it can endure:  
Give the weak a task equal to their strength.

Every bird's bite must fit its size;  
A fig cannot be every bird's bite.

Instead of milk if you feed a baby bread,  
The bread will certainly cause the baby's death.

When in due time its teeth are grown,  
The baby will crave bread on its own.

When an unfledged bird begins to fly,  
It'll become a morsel for any voracious cat;

When its wings are grown it will itself fly,  
Untroubled by the warnings from good or bad.<sup>31</sup>

### THE RELATIVE NATURE OF MODERATION

The expression 'Middle Path' (*rāh-i awṣaṭ*) may bring to mind a rather precise meaning of the performance of a deed that can be easily measured in action. But what constitutes the Middle Path from the standpoint of infinity, which has no beginning, middle, or end? Considering the wide range of individual capacities, and the fact that capacities evolve constantly over the course of time, increasing and decreasing, expanding and contracting in range and scope, it seems but logical to conclude that moderation is essentially a fluid concept. Answering his Shaykh's reproach, the dervish thus replies:

'Indeed,' he said, 'the Middle Path is the route of wisdom,  
But the notion of the mean is also a relative one.'<sup>32</sup>

That is to say, a moderate act can be evaluated only according to the nature, capacity, and ability of a person at a specific point in time. At this juncture the poet brings the abstract idea of moderation down to a sensible, practi-

31 *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, I: 579–84 (I: 583–88). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

32 *Ibid.*, II: 3531 (II: 3546). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

cal level by means of a number of examples that illustrate the relativity of the entire notion:

A stream won't even reach a camel's knee,  
Although to mice it seems a massive sea.

If someone can eat four loaves, eating two  
Is moderation from his point of view;

But it would be extreme if he should feast  
By eating all four like a greedy beast.<sup>33</sup>

Part of Rumi's discussion implicitly refers to the Qur'ānic command (XXIII: 51) to always observe moderation in eating, which is also echoed in bodies of Ḥadīth that assert that crossing the boundaries of moderate eating and drinking will bring about disease. Two specific Ḥadīths point to the stomach as the primary point of various illnesses,<sup>34</sup> as illustrated graphically in the following couplets:

Whoever craves for ten loaves of bread  
If he eats six, know that's moderate.

When I have appetite for fifty loaves –  
And you for only six; we are not equals!<sup>35</sup>

Most of the examples presented so far on the issue of moderation touch upon natural/physical or sociological aspects of human life that are normally classified in modern thought as secular. It is important to state here that the command to observe moderation not only applies to actions of a

33 Ibid., II: 3532–34 (II: 3547–49). Translation by Mojaddedi in *The Masnavi: Book Two*, trans. Mojaddedi.

34 'The stomach is the house of disease, and moderation (in food consumption) is the source of remedy' (*Al-mi'dat-u bayt-u adā' wa al-ḥamīyyah ra's-i kull-u dawā'*); see Qutb al-Din Rawandī, *Al-Da'awāt* (Qum: Intishārāt-i Madrasa Imām Mahdī 1407 A.H./1986), p. 75. Another Ḥadīth worth citing in this context is 'Indeed it is excessiveness to eat all food you crave for' (*Inna min al-sarraf in ta'kul-a kullama ishtha-hayt-a*); see Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Al-Jū'* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm 1417 A.H./1997), Ḥadīth no. 183. For further discussion of moderation in respect to dietary aspects of Sufi teaching, see *Al-Ghazālī on the Manners Relating to Eating: Book XI of The Revival of Religious Sciences*, trans. D. Johnson-Davies (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society 2000).

35 *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II: 3535–36 (II: 3550–51). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

secular nature but also extends to the domain of contemplation, religious devotion, and liturgical practice. The issue of individual capacity and the relativity of moderation may therefore be further extended into the latter realm.

You make ten prostrations in prayer and fret  
But after five hundred, I'm still on my feet.

One man plods all the way to Mecca barefoot;  
Another, walking to the corner mosque, passes out.<sup>36</sup>

The message of the above couplets is in line with the Qur'anic teachings of relation between capacity and responsibility: 'God burdens not any soul but according to its capacity' (II: 286). These couplets emphasize the importance of self-realization in the spiritual life. In order to undertake and perform any act successfully, whether secular or religious, one must realize one's individual capacity. In particular, when it comes to matters such as altruism and self-sacrifice, each person's conduct will always be determined by different standards based on individual spiritual aptitudes.

In pure devotion one offers his life.  
For another, giving up a loaf is giving up life.<sup>37</sup>

### THE FINITE NATURE OF MODERATION

It is clear that the notion of moderation and treading the Middle Path has validity and significance only in the realm of the finite, where a beginning and an end can be conceived to exist. As Rumi states:

The Middle Path belongs with the realm of the finite,  
For in it exists a beginning and an end.

Beginnings and ends mark the limits of the ground  
Upon which the position of 'middle' can be found.<sup>38</sup>

36 *Ibid.*, II: 3537–38 (II: 3552–53). Translation by Leonard Lewisohn.

37 *Ibid.*, II: 3539 (II: 3554). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

38 *Ibid.*, II: 3540–41 (II: 3555–56). Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

Moderation in religious and liturgical matters in the realm of ‘action’ indeed may be maintained, but when it comes to the life of ‘contemplation’ – the timeless essence of faith and formless reality of truth – no criterion can be found to distinguish what is ‘moderate’ or ‘the mean’ insofar as the ‘timeless’ and ‘formless’ belong to the limitless spheres of eternity and infinity.

But what is infinite has neither toe nor crown,  
No limit at either end. Where then is there a mean?<sup>39</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Mathnawī* Rumi uses the metaphoric expressions of *nān* (bread) and *nūr* (light) to differentiate between the physical domain, where moderation is conceivable, and the spiritual domain, where neither moderation nor any extreme exist. The infinite domains of divine love (*‘ishq*) or knowledge (*ma‘rifat*) are epistemological realms that are notoriously borderless, being beyond both moderation and immoderation. In this respect, using the Persian word for bread (*nān*) as a general term to refer to physical food, he adopts the Qur’ānic expression ‘do not go to extremes’ (*lā tusrifū*) to indicate the need to adhere to the path of moderation in the physical realm. In contrast, when it comes to the consumption of spiritual food, or, as he says, when ‘feasting on light’ (*nūr khurdan*) – a metaphoric expression for becoming enlightened by God – no command to limit oneself and observe proper moderation or tread the Middle Path can ever be given. Here ‘bread’ and ‘light’ are introduced as two forms of nourishment: one for the body and the other for the soul. However, as regards the latter (the food for the soul), when wining and dining on divine light, there is no such thing as excess or immoderation:

When eating bread, God said, ‘Don’t be immoderate.’  
Consuming light, God never said: ‘Hold back.’

The mouth that’s made for bread is all affliction.  
Those jaws of light are safe from all extremes;  
They’re free from excess and immoderation.<sup>40</sup>

39 Ibid., II: 3543 (II: 3557). Translation by Leonard Lewisohn.

40 Ibid., V: 2708–09 (V: 2710–11). Translation by Leonard Lewisohn

## CONCLUSION

This essay has aimed to introduce the concept of moderation in Islamic teachings in general, and in Sufi and Rūmī's thought in particular. Central to the idea of moderation, as we have seen, is the famous Ḥadīth of Moderation, which introduced the Middle Path as the right path. The element that makes Rūmī's discourse on moderation distinct is his use of simple and tangible examples to explore how moderation can be applicable in real life. His arguments are often expressed in the form of anecdotes, through which the audience is provided with clear guidelines for daily affairs. As with other stories throughout the *Mathnawī*, these anecdotes are sometimes religious in nature and refer to the lives of the prophets, while at other times they work as analogies to better expound the ethical or theological subjects under discussion.

Our study has focused on several key concepts. At the beginning, we provided an introductory account of moderation versus extremism in Islamic thought, presenting the position of the Qur'an, the traditions of the Prophet, and the views of various Sufi masters on the matter. The main body of the text focused on Rūmī's view of moderation. His view with respect to moderation in eating, sleeping, and speech were discussed, and a separate section was allocated to discussing the role of individual capacities in establishing benchmarks for moderate acts. Rūmī extends the arena of moderation to practically all layers of individual and social life – from secular activities all the way to religious rituals. In contrast, however, there is the domain of the spirit, which has an inner reality that involves faith and devotion. Such intentional modes of consciousness exist beyond the domain of matter. As such, they partake of the eternal as much as the temporal realm, and they cannot be measured; hence the notion of moderation does not apply to them.

The notion of the Middle Path, when viewed from the standpoint of infinity, which has no beginning, middle, or end, is shown to be a relative one, simply proportionate to the range of greater or lesser particular individual capacities. In sum, all Rumi's arguments naturally lead him to view the concept of moderation as something relative and finite.

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