

## **The Wasatiyyah (Moderation) Concept in Islamic Epistemology: A Case Study of its Implementation in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

*The wasatiyyah (Islamic moderation) concept is one of the concepts found in Islamic epistemology. Based on the definition of al-wasatiyyah, which in Arabic means "middle", this concept brings forth a moderate, just and the best approach. It is aimed at balancing extreme and fanatical acts in every aspect of a man's life. In line with the aspirations of the Malaysian Government to promote unity among people of different races and to refrain from social upheavals, the Malaysian government used the concept of al-wasatiyyah in an approach to implement the Gagasan 1Malaysia (the 1Malaysia Concept). Hence, the objective of this study is to determine what is the wasatiyyah concept in Islamic epistemology; and secondly, to analyse its implementation in Malaysia. This qualitative research applied an exploratory and descriptive design using the content analysis method. The content analysis method is used to identify and analyse the concept of al-wasatiyyah in Islamic epistemology and its implementation in Malaysia. Consequently, the study found that the wasatiyyah concept according to the al-Qur'an and hadith (Islamic epistemology) is not applied in a literal sense as this would portray the inherent meaning of both good (khayr) and bad (fasad) or between just ('adl) and transgression (zulm) in a simultaneously fashion. In fact, the concept of al-wasatiyyah according to Islamic epistemology carries the message of doing good with steadfastness, strength, righteousness and consistency as well as the abandonment of all forms of evil and preventing vices with wisdom. It is definitely not similar to political slogans such as "Islam Hadhari" (the Islam Hadhari Concept), "Gagasan 1Malaysia", "Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy", "Leading by Example", and others whose implementation are only transient in nature.*

**Keywords:** concept, al-wasatiyyah, Islamic epistemology, implementation

### **Introduction**

Extremism is not something new but rather it has emerged at every important juncture in world history. After the cold war, new counties had emerged that brought along extremism based on right wing racism. These racial antagonisms had caused conflicts and ethnic killings of a magnitude not witnessed since World War Two in 1945, especially in Bosnia Herzegovina and Rwanda (Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, 2013). The extremist attitude has since spread all over the world. These extremists are presumed to be a group that does not possess any human values for causing bloodshed such as the civil war in Syria, killing of Muslim Rohingyas in Myanmar, disputes between the Syiah and Sunni sects in Pakistan and so forth.

In order to deal with this issue violence, various steps have been undertaken. For example, the UN Security Council in 1993 had formed the International Criminal Tribunal<sup>1</sup>; and Malaysia had formed the South East Asian Regional Centre to fight terrorism.

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<sup>1</sup> The International Criminal Tribunal was formed according to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 827 that was approved on 25 may 1993. Its jurisdiction covers four categories of crime committed in the former Yugoslavia since 1991, which are grave transgression of the Geneva Convention, transgression of the rules of war, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Besides that, efforts based on religion were also initiated to combat this extremist culture, which is by using the *wasatiyyah* concept<sup>2</sup>. The *wasatiyyah* concept is one of the concepts emphasised in the main source of Islamic epistemology such as al-Qur'an and Hadith. The aim is to contra the extreme actions in every aspect of human life. In tandem with the aspirations of the Malaysian government to instil unity among its multi-racial citizens in order to avoid racial conflicts (National Policy Formulation Section, 2009), hence the Malaysian government headed by His Hon. Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak<sup>3</sup> had introduced the *wasatiyyah* approach to help implement the 1Malaysia concept. According to Suzalie Mohamad (2010), when every citizen regardless of race, religion, belief and culture unites, only then can Malaysia prosper, be peaceful and stable in every aspect and be looked upon by the world with respect and adoration.

Hence, the question is, what does Islamic epistemology sources say about the *wasatiyyah* concept? In addition, is the *wasatiyyah* concept implemented in Malaysia in accordance with the actual *wasatiyyah* concept mentioned in Islamic epistemology. In order to answer these two questions, this study has set two main objectives. First, to identify the *wasatiyyah* concept in Islamic epistemology; and second, to analyse its implementation in Malaysia. The qualitative study in the form of exploratory and descriptive approach used the content analysis method. The content analysis method was used to identify and analyse the *wasatiyyah* concept in Islamic epistemology and also to analyse the implementation of the *wasatiyyah* concept in Malaysia.

Overall, the discussions in this paper are divided into three main parts. First, the discussion focuses on the *wasatiyyah* concept that has been highlighted in Islamic epistemology sources such as al-Qur'an and Hadith; second, the discussion on the implementation of the *wasatiyyah* concept in Malaysia with a specific focus on the 1Malaysia Concept; and third, to discuss the pararellism of the *wasatiyyah* concept in al-Qur'an and hadith with the *wasatiyyah* ascribed in the 1Malaysia Concept.

### ***The Al-Wasatiyyah Concept in Islamic Epistemology***

*Al-Wasatiyyah* is an Arabic term originating from the word *wasat*. Actually, this term was taken and elaborated from the word *ummatan wasatan* (the moderate people), which is found in the exhortation of Allah SWT:

“Thus, have We made of you an Ummat justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qibla to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (from the Faith). Indeed it was (a change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah Make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful.” (al-Baqarah, 2:143)<sup>4</sup>

In this verse, Allah SWT explains that the Islamic people are *ummatan wasatan*. There are numerous interpretations by the religious scholars (*mufassirin*) regarding the term *wasata*, which is found in verse 143 in Surah al-Baqarah. The various interpretations of the religious scholars are stated in Table 1 below.

<sup>2</sup> In the West, this concept is called ‘moderation’. It was introduced by Aristotle since the time of the Greeks. Zainal Kling further explains that, “The phrase, moderation in all things is common extrapolation of Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean (as presented in his Nicomachean Ethics). His ethic works around finding the mean, or middle ground, between excess and deficiency. An example of this would be his presentation of courage being the happy medium between the extreme of rash action and deficiency of cowardice, in respect to a person’s possible action in the face of danger”. The Christians had also accepted the moderation concept. This was indirectly quoted by Paul when referring about a good sportsman “And everyone who competes for prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown”. Moderate is the opposite of being a fundamentalist-extremist, which portrays a very ‘lose’ religious attitude. Hence, according to the perspective of a moderate, if one holds a strong religious attitude such as being obedient to all the religious commandments, then one is a fundamentalist. This thinking actually emerged from the Christians from the West who were uncomfortable with the Evangelicals who basically held firm to the Bible and they were also called fundamentalist (Ghazali Basri, 2008:124)

<sup>3</sup> His Hon. Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak is Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister. He took the oath of allegiance as the Prime Minister on 3 April 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Besides, the term *al-wasatiyyah* is also mentioned in a few other verses, such *al-wusta* (al-Baqarah, 2:238), *awsat* (al-Ma'idah, 5:89), *awsatuhum* (al-Qalam, 68:28), dan *fawasatna* (al-'Adiyat, 100:5).

**Table 1: Interpretation of the term Wasata**

Num.	Religious Scholar Specialising in Interpretations ( <i>Mufassirrin</i> )	Interpretation of the term <i>Wasata</i>
1	Al-Tabariy (1992:8-10)	It means “the chosen, the best, the fair”. “Chosen” and “the best” because of the person’s characteristic of being fair. This differs from the extreme attitudes of the Jews and the Christians. The Christians said that Allah SWT has a son (who is Prophet Jesus a.s), while the Jews amended the holy scriptures destined from Allah SWT, killed the Prophets and lied to Allah SWT.
2	Ibn Kathir (1992:196-197)	It means the best, most humble and being fair.
3	Al-Qurtubiy (1993:104-105)	It means fair and the best. In this context, it does not mean taking a central or middle position in a matter, such as a position between good and bad.
4	Al-Raziy (1990:88-89)	It has four meanings. First, fair meaning not to take sides between two conflicting parties. In other words, fair here means to be far from both of the two extreme ends. When away from the extreme attitudes hence fairness would emerge. Second, something that is the best. Third, the most humble and perfect and the fourth is not to be extreme in religious matters. For example, the extreme attitudes of the Christians and Jews. The Christian said that Allah SWT had children (Prophet Jesus a.s.), while the Jews tried to amend the holy scripture destined by Allah SWT to them and killed the prophets who received the divine deliverance.
5	Al-Nasafiy (1996:132)	It mean the best and being fair. It is the best because of its central position. What is in the centre would be protected from anything that is dangerous compared to what is on the side and exposed to danger. It is said to be fair when it is not extreme or inclined towards some matter. For example, the Christians considered al-Masih (Prophet Jesus a.s) as God and the Jews had accused Maryam of adultery, who subsequently gave birth to Prophet Jesus a.s.
6	Al-Zamakhshariy (1995:1997)	It means the best and being most fair. Both these elements are characteristic of being central because whatever that is at the side is more likely to incline towards evil and destruction.
7	Al-Mahalliy & al-Suyutiy (t.t.:29)	It means the chosen, the best and being fair.
8	Qutb (1987:131)	It means good, humble, moderate, not being extreme at either end in relation to earthly and after-life matters.
9	Hijazi (1992:81)	It means fair and the best. Fair here means not to be extreme in matters pertaining to religion or daily affairs. While “the best” is according to aspects of <i>aqidah</i> and human relations (between individuals or society) and not victimising or supressing other people.
10	Al-Zuhayliy (1991:8-9)	It means being fair, obedient to the teachings of Islam and not to be extreme to either end in religious and worldly affairs. In this matter, the Jews and Christians have to be discounted. The Jews are inclined to worldly matters and have neglected the after-life while the Christians lay too much importance on spiritual life that they neglect worldly matters.

Hence, based on the interpretations of the religious scholars on the interpretation of the term *wasata* in Table 1 above, it is clear that the term *wasata* means the chosen, the best, being fair, humble, moderate, *istiqamah*, follow the teachings of Islam, not extreme to either end in matters pertaining worldly or the after-life, spiritual or corporeal but should be balanced between the two ends.

In greater detail, the *wasatiyyah* means something that is good and is in a position between two extremes<sup>5</sup> (M.Quraish Shihab, 1996:328), which is to weigh two extreme situations so that it does not get out of hand on either one position based on the objectives of Islamic law (*Maqasid al-Syar'iyah*) (Amir Faishol Fath, 2012:43; Ghazali Basri, 2008).

Therefore, when the *wasatiyyah* concept is practiced in everyday life, people would not have an extremist attitude at either end of the spectrum when adhering to a belief, which is to accept the belief as it is (Abdullah Basmeih, 2001); not primarily pursuing earthly matters only and neglecting the after-life or vice versa (Ridhuan Tee Abdullah, 2010); and also not to pursue riches exclusively and in due process forgetting the unfortunate.

This does not mean that the *wasatiyyah* concept takes a 50:50 stand, which is between rich and poor or being wise and unwise. According to the *wasatiyyah* concept, one can become rich but as the same time not forgetting the unfortunate and always helping them, for example, Abdul Rahman bin 'Awf r.a had donated his wealth for the sake of Islam. Pertaining to this matter, Islam has forbid someone from becoming as rich as Qarun, whose life had become increasingly rich, obnoxious and proud of his riches and he had refused to donate his wealth to the poor. In addition, one can become smart and wise but he should contribute his ideas for the development of the society and the country.

During the beginning of Islam, the Muslims were influenced by the way of life and practices of two communities. The first community were the Jews and the non-believers who were bent on earthly and physical interests. The second community were the Christians and the *al-Sabi'in*, who laid importance on spirituality and forgot about worldly affairs. When Islam emerged, its teachings harmonised these two extremes and laid importance on worldly affairs and the after-life, including the spiritual and physical aspects in a balanced and united manner besides allotting rights and human needs fairly and equally (Abdullah Mat Zin, 2013).

Hence, in order to bring about the realization of the best followers, Allah SWT and the Prophet SAW urged Muslims not to be extreme in carrying out the *ibadah* just for the sake of after-life and thus neglecting worldly affairs (al-Qasas, 28:77<sup>6</sup> & Muslim, Hadith No.3236<sup>7</sup>); not spendthrift and not frugal in using the wealth and properties (al-Furqan, 25:67<sup>8</sup>); to dismiss adversity and choose a convenient and safe way (al-Baqarah, 2:286<sup>9</sup>); to recognise the rights of others, either pertaining to religion, sects, race, philosophy, ancestry etc.

<sup>5</sup> There are other terms used to describe the meaning of extreme or being ultra, such as *al-ifrat* (extreme and beyond the actual limits), *al-tafrit* (extremely low or small), *al-ghuluww* (self-burdening confidence that is beyond capability), *al-israf* (frugal and wasteful use of wealth), *al-tasyaddud* (extremely strict), and *al-tanattu'* (inappropriate or overly committed to religious rituals (*beribadah*)) (Basri Ibrahim al-Hasani al-Azhari, 2007:6-9; Amir Faishol Fath, 2012:43-47).

<sup>6</sup> Allah SWT exhorted "But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief." (al-Qasas, 28:77).

<sup>7</sup> Anas (Allah be pleased with him) reported that some of the Companions of Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) asked his (the Prophet's) wives about the acts that he performed in private. Someone among them (among his Companions) said: I will not marry women; someone among them said: I will not eat meat; and someone among them said: I will not lie down in bed. He (the Holy Prophet) praised Allah and glorified Him, and said: What has happened to these people that they say so and so, whereas I observe prayer and sleep too; I observe fast and suspend observing them; I marry women also? And he who turns away from my Sunnah, he has no relation with Me (Reported by Muslim, Book 8, Hadith 3236).

<sup>8</sup> Allah SWT exhorted: "Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes)." (al-Furqan, 25:67).

<sup>9</sup> Allah SWT exhorted: "On no soul doth Allah Place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns. (Pray:) Our God! Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our God! Lay not on us a burden like that which Thou didst lay on those before us; Our God! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. Thou art our Protector; Help us against those who stand against faith." (al-Baqarah, 2:286).

(al-Hujurat, 49:13<sup>10</sup>); and to allot the right of freedom to worship (al-Kahfi, 18:29<sup>11</sup>). Besides that, Islam also permits its followers to use their worldly riches with good intentions and limitations (al-A'raf, 7:31-32)<sup>12</sup>.

Therefore, based on these discussions, it can be acknowledged that *al-wasatiyyah* is an approach much acclaimed by Islam. A comprehensive and integrated approach is capable of solving the demands and problems of the *ummah*. Actually, *al-wasatiyyah* calls on followers of Islam to practice Islam in a balanced and comprehensive manner in all aspects of life and society by focusing on improving the quality of human life associated with developing knowledge, human development, economic and financial system, political system, nationhood, defence, unity, equality among races etc.

Unity and the inequality gap among races in Malaysia could be managed by adhering to the *wasatiyyah* concept that foresees balance or equilibrium and not a extreme attitude harbouring on either end of the spectrum. Extreme attitudes cause destruction, just as what has been said by the Prophet SAW and narrated by Abdullah r.a. meaning:

“Abdullah reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Ruined, were those who indulged in hair-splitting. He (the Holy Prophet) repeated this thrice.” (Muslim, Hadith no. 4823)

Thus, extreme attitudes impel the emergence of attitudes that lambast small issues and are not open to differences of opinions and criticisms. In this case, an open attitude includes factors of affection and unity.

### **Definition of the 1Malaysia Concept**

Since the 1Malaysia Concept was the brainchild of His Hon. Prime Minister Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, hence its definition would first refer to his explanation as follows:

“We stand, we think and act as Malaysians. And we take actions based on the need of all the ethnic groups in our country. This does not mean that we put aside the affirmative policy, the policy to help the *Bumiputeras*’ as long as the policy is implemented fairly and duly considers the eligible *Bumiputeras*’ that qualify to be considered by the Government. We move on from the ethnic oriented actions that we have been practicing all this long”. (an excerpt from the National Policy Publications Section, 2009:8)

Thus, based on this explanation, we could make at least two conclusions. First, Malaysians from various ethnic backgrounds need to think beyond their racial divide. They also need to foster actions beyond the wall of ethnic and racial significance, hence, a racial group should not only think within the scope of its own race. They should not limit their actions to matters pertaining to their own race; and secondly, the national leaders should entertain and fulfil all the needs and rights of the people without considering race or religion in Malaysia.

Therefore, the 1Malaysia Concept has the intention to unite the people of various races and religion in this country without altering the identity and religion of the races. Besides protecting the interests of all the races, the 1Malaysia Concept also emphasises on the question of integration and the creation of a Malaysian race. The 1Malaysia Concept also emphasises on the attitude of acceptance among the multi-racial people. A race should accept the uniqueness of other races to live together in a mutually respectful situation as a people of one country (National Policy Publications Section, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Allah SWT exhorted: “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (al-Hujurat, 49:13).

<sup>11</sup> Allah SWT exhorted: “Say: “The truth is from your God”: Let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (it): for the wrong-doers We have prepared a Fire whose (smoke and flames), like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in: if they implore relief they will be granted water like melted brass, that will scald their faces, how dreadful the drink! How uncomfortable a couch to recline on.” (al-Kahfi, 18:29).

<sup>12</sup> Allah SWT exhorted: “O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters. Say: Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah, which He hath produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He hath provided) for sustenance? Say: They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgment. Thus do We explain the signs in detail for those who understand.” (al-A'raf, 7:31-32).

## The Principles of the 1Malaysia Concept

The 1Malaysia Concept has three principles. The elaboration on the three principles is as follows:

First, the principle of acceptance. This principle emphasises that although Malaysians consists of various races with various religions, way of life, practices and cultures but they still accept each other as friends (National Policy Publications Section, 2009). This means that although the practices and way of life of these various races often contradict the religion and way of life of each other, they can still respect each other.

Second, is the principle of nationhood. The concept of unity, nationalistic spirit and love for the country had been assimilated a long ago by the previous leaders. For example, Tunku Abdul Rahman being the leader of the Coalition Party with Tun Tan Cheng Lok and Tun V.T. Sambanthan, had fought for independence and freedom from the colonial British for the Malay Land. Tun Abdul Razak had envisioned the Principles of Nationhood (*Rukun Negara*) and the New Economic Policy (DEB), which was intended to unite the multi-racial people in the country. Then, Tun Hussein Onn endeavoured to nurtured unity among the people until he was called the 'Father of Unity'. So to Tun Dr. Matahir Mohamad and Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who introduced the Vision 2020 and the *Cemerlang, Gemilang dan Terbilang* concept to nurture unity among the multi-racial people in this country (National Policy Publications Section, 2009; Zulhilmi Paidi & Rohani Abdul Ghani, 2003).

Third, the principle of social justice. Every race in this country, not considering their background or religion, are given treated fairly in terms of welfare and important social aspects. Hence, this principle is not an avenue to any party to seek claims that are extreme or beyond limits (National Policy Publications Section, 2009).

### *The Incorporation of the Wasatiyyah Concept in the 1Malaysia Concept*

Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak has applied the *wasatiyyah* concept into the 1Malaysia Concept that was introduced by him<sup>13</sup>. This was explained in his speech during a press conference:

“Combining the 1Malaysia Concept and the *wasatiyyah* concept in Islam that lays importance on moderation and balance, needs to be promoted in order to form an *ummah* that centres on the strength of the *iman* without neglecting the principles of tolerance and social justice for a multi-racial society and religion of the country in order to ascertain the full support of the people towards the socioeconomic transformation agenda that’s being implemented and also the support of the Islamic community, who are the majority in this country”. (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2010).

The purpose of co-relating these two concepts is to increase the understanding and unity among the races based on the *wasatiyyah* concept. In addition, it also intends to avoid the emergence of radical and extremist groups from various religions, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists or even Islamic (Ismail Ibrahim, 2009). According to Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak (2010:46), with the *wasatiyyah* concept, the teachings of Islam would be realised more comprehensively and balanced in its demand of allegiance. It intends to make Malaysia a Islamic country by example, one that is developed and balanced in every scope.

### *Analysing the Incorporation of the Wasatiyyah Concept in the 1Malaysia Concept*

Efforts have been made towards applying the *wasatiyyah* concept in the 1Malaysia Concept. Hence, the application has not been generalised and people are less aware of it. As observed by the researcher, the *wasatiyyah* concept has been applied in five aspects, such as:

#### **1. Al-Wasatiyyah According to the Aspect of Religious Freedom**

According to Mashitoh Ibrahim (2011), the *wasatiyyah* concept can be implementing in the overall aspect of life and one aspect of life is the religious aspect. The freedom to ascribe to religion is mentioned in the first principle of 1Malaysia Concept, which is the principle of acceptance. Acceptance here means that the Malaysian people accept and respect the differences in religion and culture.

<sup>13</sup> In order to set the contents, direction and planning of *wasatiyyah's* implementation so that it is in line with the government's intention to create a harmonious unity among the people of various races, religions and cultures in this country, hence a Panel of *al-Wasatiyyah* Concept Thinkers was formed. It was headed by Jamil Khir Hj. Baharom, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Department of Islamic Development, 2010).

Thus, if the religious advocates in this country truly appreciate their own religion, then the initial point of understanding would surely exist. Religion is not the source of disunity but rather the pillar to unity (Jafril Khalil, 2002).

When discord occurs between religions, rising enmity and the reluctance to understand one's own religion, hence this will result in bloodshed, as what had happened to the Muslim Rohingyas in Myanmar. Although in Malaysia the society is multi-religious with a varied way of life, there is mutual respect and acceptance of the differences. Even if there arises issues on religion, for example if there some among the non-Muslims who contest the sacrificial rituals (*ibadah korban*) conducted in schools, hence this matter was brought under control by explaining the meaning of this ritual and why it was conducted in schools to the parties concerned.

Pertaining to this matter, the 1Malaysia Concept tries to re-enact the history of nation forming and the Islamic civilization in Madinah by the Holy Prophet SAW. The Madinah Constitution sealed between the Prophet and the non-Islamic community and rekindled the spirit of tolerance in practising one's own religion (Mashitoh Ibrahim, 2011). Therefore, with the Madinah Charter, the people of Madinah of various races lived in harmony and mutual respect although they practiced different religions. The Prophet SAW afforded the freedom of religion to those who were not from the Islamic faith. This matter was in line with the exhortations of Allah SWT:

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.” (al-Baqarah, 2:256).

This verse clearly shows that there is no element of coercion in Islam. People are not coerced to profess to Islam but they are invited to ponder about it and if they think rationally, then surely they would accept Islam. Conversely, if there is coercion, hence will arise the unjust trespass on the thinking of people and the ensuing problems (Zulkifli Mohamad al-Bakri, 2008). According to Yusuf al-Qaradhawi (2009:194), the ruling authorities have the right to have laws that protect and safeguard its existence. Therefore, this system would be alive and expand.

This situation is being practiced in Malaysia at present as evidenced in Article 3(1) of the Federal Constitution, which states that the Islamic faith is the official religion and the position of Islam is higher than other religions. Although other religions are not mentioned in the Federal Constitution, they are considered if they are followed and practiced in peace and harmony. Actually, the freedom of religion is not absolute. In Clause (4) of Article 11, the power is given to Parliament and the state legislative bodies to enact laws to control other religions from imposing on people of the Islamic faith (Mohamed Azam Mohamad Adil *et. al*, 2010).

Hence, based on this discussion, Islam does not tolerate matters pertaining to matters such as faith and religious worship. The grandeur and nobility of Islam as a monotheistic religion will surely be gauged as during the times of the Holy Prophet SAW. At that time, the Musyirikin (non-believers) had requested that Prophet SAW interchangeably profess between the religions. Thus based on the guidance from Allah SWT, the Prophet SAW stood firm on this fundamental issue. The prophet SAW had explained to them as what was exhorted by Allah SWT, meaning:

“Say: O ye that reject Faith! I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your Way, and to me mine.” (al-Kafirun, 109:1-6)

This verse explains the freedom accorded to other religions to practice their religion. Hence, followers of other religions cannot ridicule or belittle the Islamic faith, including other religions according to their fancy. Although in Malaysia there are conflicting views and opinions regarding the respective religious practices, especially on the aspect of belief, hence this matter should be questioned or raised. The followers of the Islamic faith and other religions have agreed not to question the sanctity of each other's religion (Ismail Ibrahim, 2010).

The *wasatiyyah* concept in Islam also emphasises the attitude of mutual respect although coming from different religions. The virtues and philosophy (*akhlaq*) of the Prophet SAW towards the followers of other religions should be an example on the multi-religious aspect. For example, the Prophet's SAW Hadiths narrated by Jabir bin Abdullah r.a.:

“Narrated Jabir bin ‘Abdullah: A funeral procession passed in front of us and the Prophet stood up and we too stood up. We said: O Allah's Apostle! This is the funeral procession of a Jew. He said: Whenever you see a funeral procession, you should stand up.” (al-Bukhariy, Hadith no. 1228). Thus, based on this hadiths, it is clear that Islam strongly encourages its followers to show respect and act humanely to other although of different religions.

## 2. *Al-Wasatiyyah* in Distributing Wealth

The relationship among societies would be in jeopardy if there are hindrances to economic implementations. When economic gains are unevenly distributed, hence an apparent economic divide among the rich and poor would emerge. Therefore, the accumulated riches cannot be held by one party or ethnic group but should be divided fairly between all ethnic groups. The balance and quality in dividing the riches as mentioned in the third principle of the Malaysia Concept, which is the principle of social justice. This is in tandem with the characteristics of equality and justice found in the *wasatiyyah* concept.

In Islam, all that is found between the earth and the heavens absolutely belongs to Allah SWT. This is exhorted by Him:

“To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: To Him do all questions go back (for decision).” (Ali ‘Imran, 3:109).

This verse explains that the riches and wealth are not absolutely owned by an individual or a particular race but rather it belongs to Allah SWT. Humans are only attributed the responsibility and trust as consumers according to their needs in daily life. If we look back to the history of Islamic rule during the time of Caliphate al-Rasyidin, the non-Islamic society was treated well and not excluded from enjoying the nation’s riches. There was an incident when Caliph ‘Umar al-Khattab r.a met an elderly Jew who was seeking alms. The Caliph was saddened by the sight and enquired as the elder's fate. The elder replied that due to his elderly state he was not able to find any work. Upon hearing his plight Caliph ‘Umar al-Khattab r.a immediately took him to Jerusalem. There, Caliph ‘Umar al-Khattab r.a. instructed that the elder be taken care off. The Caliph said that:

“There is no justice, we collect taxes (*jizyah*) from them when they are young and leave them when they are old.” (excerpt from Suzalie Mohamad, 2010).

Furthermore, by implementing the *wasatiyyah* concept it encourages one to act justly towards his adversaries. Allah SWT iterated this matter in the al-Qur'an so that one would always act justly among humans without considering the race (al-Ma'idah,5:8)<sup>14</sup>. The just attitude would increase man's consciousness towards Allah SWT.

Thus, in terms of governance and administration, every aspect of development that's being drawn-up needs to ensure benefits are accrued to the public. Malaysia has witnessed the riots of 13 May 1969, which occurred due to the economical divide among races that caused dissatisfaction among the people. In order to solve this problem, the New Economic Policy (DEB) was implemented from 1970-1990 as a step towards bridging the economical divide among the races in Malaysia. In fact, this is called *al-wasatiyyah*, something initiated by the Prime Minister to avoid racial disunity. The Malay-Muslims at that time were left behind in the economics sector were then given aid without discriminating other races (Mohd Ayop Abdul Razid, 2010).

During the reign of Caliph al-Rasydin the non-Islamic community was exempted from paying alms but had to pay taxes called *al-jizyah*. The aim was to ensure the safety and protection for them against outside threats. In order to create an understanding and forge closer ties among the society, the *al-wasatiyyah* concept played a significant role while avoiding extremist attitudes. According to Mashitoh Ibrahim (2011), the extremist spirit based on racial sentiments and ideology becomes the catalyst for socio-political instability in a country.

Therefore, the question of distributing wealth is also an important factor in creating social stability among the society. This should be given serious attention and equal distribution should be practiced to tip the balance. It is clear that the *wasatiyyah* concept in a way has succeeded in harmonising inter-racial relationships in Malaysia. The weak and poor have been advocated without considering race or religion and indirectly disunity and dissatisfaction has been avoided.

<sup>14</sup> Allah SWT exhorted: “O ye who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.” (al-Ma'idah, 5:8)



### 3. *Al-Wasatiyyah* in the Distribution of Political Power

A justly distribution of political power is mentioned in the third principles of the 1Malaysia Concept, which is the principle of social justice. According to Subky Latif (2002), sharing of power between races is an effort to form unity.

Political life has to be just and capable of understanding political adversaries (Jafril Khalil, 2002; Sirojuddin Aly, 2002). Although there exist ethnic and ideological differences, hence the vision to develop the nation must be likewise. For a country with a multi-racial population, distribution of political power must represent the existing races. This will help avoid feelings of dissatisfaction towards the ruler and subsequent tumultuous state. Each race in Malaysia was given the opportunity to form a political party of their own. For example, UMNO represents the Malays, MCA represents the Chinese and MIC represents the Indians and as well as other components parties. The wisdom in distributing political power in a just manner is clearly based on the *wasatiyyah* concept. Hence, if there arises some discord on the allocation of seats to be contested but so far the situation has been settled amicably via discussions.

History has proven that in several Islamic territories, the non-Islamic society has been involved in administration. For example, in Andalusia, there were certain territories that were ruled by the Jews. The Christian and Jewish community at that time had accepted the territories as Islamic territories without any coercion or pressure (Suzalie Mohamad, 2009).

In the Malaysian context, although the Malay-Islam race is the majority race, hence the other races such as the Chinese and Indians are also involved in the line of leadership. It is evident that distribution of political power is based on the *wasatiyyah* concept. Distribution of power according to the *wasatiyyah* concept is capable of avoiding extreme claims of one race to obtain more power.

### 4. *Al-Wasatiyyah* in the Use of Language

In an effort to create harmony, there is a need for language. This means that the people need to have the spirit of sacrifice and the willingness to accept national culture as a unifying culture (Sirojuddin Aly, 2002). The use of a single language is contained in the second principle of the 1Malaysia Concept, which is the nationhood principle. The use of a single language stimulates the achievement of racial integration and hastens unity and feelings of racial harmony among races. The harmonious situation is similar to the characteristic found in the *wasatiyyah* concept.

Thus, to strengthen inter-racial relations in Malaysia, an identity that signifies a Malaysian race should be given priority. In this context, the '*bahasa Malaysia*' is the language that signifies the Malaysian race that comprises various other races. Although the '*bahasa Malaysia*' is the national language, it does not mean that other languages cannot be used or are neglected. This is proven when the Tamil and Mandarin languages are still taught in national type schools. Moreover, in the Malaysian context, the people are encouraged to learn foreign languages.

The Prophet SAW while in Madinah had initiated the use of a single language. Hence, the Prophet did not discard other languages because by learning and commanding other languages it would be easy for someone to appreciate other cultures. This would ease efforts in strengthening ties between races (Mohd Napiyah Abdullah, 2002).

Actually, the implementation of the *wasatiyyah* concept in Malaysia in the language context has rather managed to create harmony and not the extolling of any one race or any one language. Conversely, the *bahasa Malaysia* is the identity of the Malaysian race, which are the symbol and the pillar of the nation that should be appreciated while at the same time not neglecting other languages. The people would find it rather difficult to accept this symbol if it is still politicised.

### 5. *Al-Wasatiyyah* in Education

The *wasatiyyah* concept is applied in the education context with the intention of seeking a point of balance not only as a process for delivering information, knowledge and superficial skills but it is also a transformation process of the self and the system. True and beneficial knowledge if disseminated and interpreted according to the *wasatiyyah* concept would eventually yield people with firm religious beliefs and a civilised mannerism. This becomes very relevant in these changing times because it possess a good balanced quality.

Many Islamic countries do not have an integrated education system, which eventually causes knowledge associated with managing systems to be under developed and the capability to manage system resources to be deficient. Thus, this causes the spiritual quality among the people to rise but the ability to practice becomes unproductive and the Islamic people become pawns to the powerful adversaries, especially in the field of science and technology.

Therefore, education based on the *wasatiyyah* concept is education that integrates the mental and physical knowledge and also the religious knowledge pertaining to the self and society. In the Malaysian context, the *wasatiyyah* concept has been applied in education. For example, besides being taught subjects in science, the arts and so forth, they are also taught Islamic studies. Besides the Islamic studies being taught in schools, the authorities have also catered for classes in religious studies or *fardu ain* outside the normal school hours. However, the application aspect of the *wasatiyyah* concept in education ought to be consolidated because in the present public examination system the Islamic Studies subject is not acknowledged as a compulsory passing subject. Moreover, if this matter continues, hence efforts to balance the aspects of mental strength and spiritual strength would be difficult.

Quality education is education that is capable of forming characters and exemplary personalities. A source of an example is something that is of the finest quality because it is from that example that the best behaviour would emerge. This was the basis of the Prophet's SAW struggle to spread reformation and education in order to refine the human character.

### ***The Congruity Between the Wasatiyyah Concept in Islamic Epistemology and in the 1Malaysia Concept***

Based on the earlier discussions it was found that the *wasatiyyah* concept applied in the 1Malaysia Concept is in tandem with the *wasatiyyah* concept in Islamic epistemology. This is evident as when the 1Malaysia Concept had applied the *wasatiyyah* concept, it managed to form a moderate and balanced society. Alternatively, this effort does not mean that it intends to form a society that is equal on all terms or holds a central position, such as being neither poor nor rich or neither smart nor not that smart. Actually, it intends to make all Malaysians a better Malaysian. One can become rich but he must not forget his relationship with Allah SWT and his relationship among fellow humans or Allah SWT's creations. Besides that, he could initiate development but the development must not destroy the human mind and its surroundings. According to Siti Rafmah Zakaria (2007), many problems have emerged when humans or societies have been misled from their intended path, especially pertaining to aspects of balance and moderation (*al-wasatiyyah*) that could be achieved. Consequently, these imbalances and lack of moderation would invite problems another nature. This view portrays the importance of applying the *al-wasatiyyah* concept in all aspects of human life.

### ***Conclusion***

Therefore, based on the overall discussions in this study, it is found that the *wasatiyyah* concept that is applied in the 1Malaysia Concept is in tandem with the *wasatiyyah* concept found in the main sources of Islamic epistemology. However, this application is not exclusive. In the Malaysian context, the *wasatiyyah* concept is the best concept in efforts to engender unity among the Malaysian people. Hence, Malaysia has applied the *wasatiyyah* concept in five aspects, such as religious freedom, distribution of wealth, distribution of political power, use of language and education. Thus, the *wasatiyyah* concept is appropriate for an extensive and widespread application on all aspects national administration because the roots of disunity can be curtailed before it affirms itself in the minds of society. Although differences are the cause of disunity, hence the *wasatiyyah* concept in Islam is there to unite people without destroying these differences. So too with the Malaysian society that comprises numerous races, religions and cultures, hence the dream to create understanding and an harmonious relationship can be achieved without destroying the identity of a particular race.

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