

THE STRAIGHT PATH IS THE MIDDLE PATH AND THE GUIDANCE



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INTRODUCTION

In the Name of Allah (SWT), the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Perfect Peace and Blessings be granted Muhammad (SAW) the best model for guidance to what Allah (SWT) has revealed for compliance.

Blessed are his successors who serve as torch bearers after him.

May Allah (SWT) who has admitted us into this fold of His Compassion and Mercy aid us to bear and live it rightly.

This booklet is an attempt to extract guidance from the guidance available for guidance, as much as Allah (SWT) permits.

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It is certainly not enough to know how to practice the religion of Islam, it is even more important to know the basic standard because; men differ in their capacities for engagement. And the standard is the primary focus in everything AND NOT THE EXCEPTION. As a way of life for humanity, it will be misleading to assess and rate people beyond their fitting into the baseline standard. This is a critical take off point because only Allah (SWT) can rate His slaves or servants and His chosen model is the best to instruct and guide. The orientation of Islamic religion and culture is not to make prophets out of its followers. It is not even aimed at making saints out of the believers. While Prophets and Messengers are at the absolute discretion of Allah (SWT), believers can strive according to their abilities BUT WITHIN THE STANDARD.

Any mix up between these can conveniently create wrong understanding of Islam. And there are two historical grounds for this. The first is that in generation of Muhammad (SAW), who nursed the religion to maturity and certified completion, there were believers of different capacities. And between them, two classes are of superior interest. One of these was made up of *Ahlu-Suffa*. They were like a band of believers who cared and focused with total commitment to the tenets of the religion. They were poor and depended on whatever the Prophet (SAW) was able to provide them. The mosque was their home and worship was their calling. The other category is the close companions of the Prophet (SAW) like the first BUT who attained the recognition of being the rightly guided successors of the Messenger of Allah (SAW). These were Abu Bakr (RA), Umar (RA), Uthman (RA) and Ali (RA). The second historical ground is the warning by the Prophet (SAW) that after him, there will arise developments and generation of believers who will be seen to practice so well that some believers will view themselves as

inferior, whereas the former may be on the wrong path. And he categorically provided that his generation of companions were safe along with three further generations.

And today we are the true witnesses to this pointer. At the world level, there are those that have been identified as Traditionalists, there are Fundamentalists and there are Modernists beginning to carve an identity. Across these, there are Sunnis and the Shi'a and even Ibadi. And except for the modernists that are totally materially inclined, the other two have attachments of Sufi Orders.

In Nigeria, the exposure of those that are in the forefront of religious education and even movements have their roots of influence in the Sunni and Shi'a except a few miscreants that lack any sound scholarly basis for guidance. And the measure is in the interpretation of the Qur'an, Hadiths, life history of the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and rulings on judicial matters. This is why for instance those who claim to be Salafis could be found with leaders that are not in the tracks of Izala which claims to be the Sunni fold. And both the Tariqas of Tijjaniyya and Qadiriyya that are Sufi orders are often at disagreement or even verbal war with the Izala that shares the same ideological trappings with them. The Ahmadis that can also be associated with the main stream Sunni or Traditional Islam has the colourings of its Asian leadership guide. At a time they were even restrained from participating in Hajj. In Nigeria, while the missionary effort cut across the country, it has found a comfort sitting in the tolerant cultural admission of south west Nigeria. This is regardless of the several names Muslim organizations bear. And the umbrella of NASFAT with its Fountain University is the ultimate structural development of this group. Generally, strict adherence to the tenets of Islam differs between the different groups.

But what is the foundation yardstick that must not be deviated from by any of the groups? And this must apply either at the world level or in Nigeria, as the basic education for the ordinary believer to get a safe bearing.

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): The Prophet (SAW) said, “Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings and at nights.”

The middle path is therefore the standard that every average believer can bear. The straight path is not for specialists in the religion of Islam. And because Islam covers, necessary consistency in compliance between spiritual and worldly matters, it will amount to difficulty or even abuse, to rate concordance outside what is bearable, from what is BASIC. An example of this guide is defined by the hadith from the mother of the believers.

Narrated Aisha (RA): Once the Prophet (SAW) came while a woman was sitting with me. He said, “Who is she?” I replied, “She is so and so” and told him about her (excessive) praying. He said disapprovingly, “Do (good) deeds which is within your capacity (without overtaxing yourself) as Allah (SWT) does not get tired (of giving rewards) but (surely) you will get tired; the best deed (act of worship) in the sight of Allah (SWT) is that which is done regularly.”

The level or weight need not be exhausting, which provides room for the accommodation of different capacities. But, NOT outside or beyond a given prescribed standard. The report from Humran (RA) spells an example.

Narrated Humran (RA) (the freed slave of Uthman ibn Affan): I saw Uthman ibn Affan asking (for a tumbler of water) to perform ablution (and when it was brought) he poured water from it over his hands and washed them thrice and then put his hand in the water container and rinsed his mouth and washed his nose by putting water in it and then blowing it out. Then he washed his face thrice and (then) forearms up to the elbows thrice, then passed his wet hands over his head and then washed each foot thrice. After that Uthman (RA) said, “I saw the Prophet (SAW) performing ablution like this of mine, and he said, ‘If anyone performs ablution like that of mine and offers a two-raka’at prayer during which he does not think of anything else (not related to the present prayer) then his past sins will be forgiven.’”

In this guidance, using an ablution that has not gotten voided will not stop one from undertaking another prayer even though another fresh ablution will be perfect. It can therefore not be a basis for disagreement. And washing the parts four or more times as against three and two times as against once in some levels will not make the ablution better. By deduction, the amount of water useable by a believer for his ablution can differ between people but does not give it any quality difference, provided the ablution has been properly performed. This foundation for interacting with Allah (SWT) is completely defined.

Narrated Abdullah ibn Umar (RA): I saw that whenever Allah’s Apostle (SAW) stood for the prayer, he used to raise his hands up to the shoulders and used to do the same on saying Takbir for bowing and on raising his head from it and used to say *Sami’a l-lahu liman hamidah*. But he did not do that (i.e. raising his hands) in prostration.

This also defines the limits of raising hands in salat that can be admitted as proper and for the teaching and practice of adherents. Thus, the rule of the necessity of the very first one in opening the prayer with the very first takbir is admissible provided there is no skipping between the others or adding to the full standard.

Because of the critical status of salat, that is the best platform for a believer to relate with Allah (SWT), a further definition of limits is found in the practice of the Messenger of Allah (SAW).

Narrated Ibn Abbas (RA): The Prophet (SAW) was ordered (by Allah (SWT)) to prostrate on seven parts and not to tuck up the clothes or hair (while praying). Those parts are: the forehead (along with the tip of nose), both hands, both knees and (toes of) both feet.

That, this practice is based on ablution, intention for the prayer and possible facing of the Qibla, it will amount to difficulty to rate this as the same with the deteriorating style of Yoruba respect for elders as worship, that is reserved for Allah (SWT). It will amount to extremism to define the greeting culture as worship, even when it does not require the specific distinctions for interacting with Allah (SWT).

Because the religion is not for isolation and congressional prayer is of top value, the principle or guide for the standard is also given.

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): Allah's Apostle (SAW) said, "If anyone of you leads the people in the prayer, he should shorten it for amongst them are the weak, the sick and the old; and if anyone among you prays alone then he may prolong (the prayer) as much as he wishes."

This is commonly so. Those who know what the practice of the Messenger of Allah (SAW) was, knew that in the dawn and night prayers, he stood longer than in the afternoon prayers. And he could recite short or medium surahs or a combination of them. But he specifically remained long in standing, bowing and prostration in his personal night prayers or eclipse prayer. And whenever it was short, it was calm, beautiful and consuming.

In the area of sacrifice, believers have not been left without a full guidance on the basic standard.

Narrated Al-Bara (RA): The Prophet (SAW) on the day of *Idul-Adha* faced us and said, “On this day of ours, our first act of worship is the offering of prayer and then we will return and slaughter the sacrifice, and whoever does this concords with the sunnah; and whoever slaughtered his sacrifice before that (i.e. before the prayer) then that was a thing which he prepared earlier for his family and it will not be considered as a *nusuk* (sacrifice).” A man stood up and said, “O Allah’s Messenger (SAW)! I slaughtered (the animal before the prayer) but I have a young she-goat which is better than an older sheep.” The Prophet (SAW) said to him, “Slaughter it. But a similar sacrifice will not be sufficient for anybody else after you.”

It will thus amount to assuming the position of the discretionary guidance of Muhammad (SAW) for any believer or leader to adjust the definition of what is suitable for sacrifice. The basic standard for camels, cows, rams and sheep have been fully defined. It is either you meet it or fail to do so.

The middle path also requires the leader to carry along followers, with clear clarity in matters of guidance or example.

Narrated Anas (RA): Whenever the Prophet (SAW) spoke a sentence (said a thing), he used to repeat it thrice so that the people could understand it properly from him and whenever he asked permission to enter, (he knocked the door) thrice with greeting.

Leadership in Islam is to carry as many believers along, without difficulty of understanding. Therefore there must be no mix up or controversy over whatever is within as against what is without. It will then be contradictory and outrageous to entertain what is improper or illegal. Pork cannot be used for sacrifice and intrusion into privacy has to be with consent.

Narrated An-Nu'man ibn Bashir (RA): I heard Allah's Apostle (SAW) saying, "Both legal and illegal things are evident but in-between them there are doubtful (suspicious) things and most of the people have no knowledge about them. So whoever saves himself from these suspicious things saves his religion and his honour. And whoever indulges in these suspicious things is like a shepherd who grazes (his animals) near the *Hima* (private pasture) of someone else and at any moment he is liable to get in it. (O people) Beware! Every king has a *Hima* and the *Hima* of Allah (SWT) on this earth is His illegal (forbidden) things. Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart."

This is the standard for caution against clear encroachment beyond defined limits. An example will be family planning accessories, artificial insemination, etc. Those who decide to go beyond the obvious definitions do so on volition. Those who follow them must know that the safety is risky as it is uncertain. Keeping within the limits is not only more convenient but the basic standard that gives assurance.

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): A Bedouin came to the Prophet (SAW) and said, “Tell me such a deed as will make me enter Paradise, if I do it.” The Prophet (SAW) said, “Worship Allah (SWT), and worship none along with Him, offer the (five) prescribed compulsory prayers perfectly, pay the compulsory Zakat, and fast the month of Ramadan.” The Bedouin said, “By Him, in whose Hands my life is, I will not do more than this.” When he (the Bedouin) left, the Prophet (SAW) said, “Whoever likes to see a man of Paradise, then he may look at this man.”

This standard points at the fact that extras or overtime are not the standard except on personal volition, and institutionalizing such will amount to over stretching. It will be broader on introducing a new qualitative standard in respect of an indisputably admitted right. And the basic standard is required to be a living culture.

Narrated Anas (RA): I was informed that the Prophet (SAW) had said to Mu’adh, “Whoever will meet Allah (SWT) without associating anything in worship with Him will go to Paradise.” Mu’adh asked the Prophet (SAW), “Should I not inform the people of this good news?” The Prophet (SAW) replied, “No, I am afraid, lest they should depend on it (absolutely).”

This is because all men are born believers until the parents colour them. No one will cross over his *Qadr*. Declaration of faith is a SURE license for Jannah except again if he abandons it by burning in the form of apostasy. But the share in the fire will be according to overweight of evil records. Safety from fire will be according to the degree of good deeds. And none will have been possible without the mercy of Allah (SWT) which outweighs His anger. This guiding principle amounts to the practical doing of a believer’s best in the religion. And Allah (SWT) loves those who strive – on the defined terms.

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): The Prophet (SAW) said, “None of you should say, ‘O Allah! Forgive me if You wish’ or ‘Bestow Your mercy on me if You wish’ or ‘Provide me with means of subsistence if You wish’ but he should be firm in his request, for Allah (SWT) does what He wills and nobody can force Him (to do anything). The middle path that is the straight path is not free from trials. But this does not call for excesses to be used as the standard.”

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): The Prophet (SAW) said, “Leave me as I leave you for the people who were before you were ruined because of their questions and their differences over their Prophets. So, if I forbid you to do something, then keep away from it. And if I order you to do something, then do of it as much as you can.”

These will cover obligatory and voluntary actions.

Narrated Anas ibn Malik (RA): Allah’s Apostle (SAW) said, “People will not stop asking questions till they say, ‘This is Allah (SWT), the Creator of everything, then who created Allah?’”

This is a cautionary guidance against exceeding limits defined. Going beyond is inconsequential and risky apart from the likely difficulty, no matter how straight, solid and impressive it may appear. Thus, we have a practical clarification report.

Narrated Aisha (RA): Whenever Allah’s Messenger (SAW) ordered the Muslims to do something, he used to order them deeds which were easy for them to do, (according to their strength and endurance). They said, “O Allah’s Apostle (SAW)! We are not like you. Allah has forgiven your past and future sins.” So Allah’s Apostle (SAW) became angry and it was apparent on his face. He said, “I am the most Allah fearing and know Allah better than all of you do.”

Moderation within convenient ability is not only right but absolutely safe. Ambition can be very risky. This is a most worthy caution against the spirit of practicing for ego show or racing against another person. The case is not different, when some adjustments are applied trickishly by a believer.

Narrated Anas ibn Malik (RA): A group of three men came to the houses of the wives of the Prophet (SAW) asking how the Prophet (SAW) worshipped Allah (SWT), and when they were informed about that, they considered their worship insufficient and said, “Where are from the Prophet (SAW) as his past and future sins have been forgiven.” Then one of them said, “I will offer the prayer throughout the night forever.” The other said, “I will fast throughout the year and will not break my fast.” The third said, “I will keep away from the women and will not marry forever.” Allah’s Apostle (SAW) came to them and said, “Are you the same people who said so and so? By Allah, I am more submissive to Allah (SWT) and more afraid of Him than you, yet I fast and break my fast, I do sleep and also marry women. So he who does not follow my tradition in religion, is not from me (not one of my followers).”

So, exceptional performance is not the standard or the invitation. And the safety guard is knowledge.

Narrated Mu’awiya ibn Abi Sufyan (RA): During a sermon I heard the Prophet (SAW) saying, “If Allah (SWT) wants to do a favour to somebody, He bestows on him the gift of understanding the Qur’an and Sunnah.”

Knowledge of the religion is compulsory. It must be sought by each and every one. Thus, the torch bearers for guidance are the learned, the scholars who keep to the limits, by instruction and practice. As Leaders among leaders in other areas of

livelihood, if they are non-existent, the ignorant will take their place. If they hesitate to guide (not abusing or merely criticizing) they will face severe punishment. If they guide wrongly, they will sweep a lot away along to the displeasure of Allah (SWT). Those in authority and those endowed with riches depend on foundation of guidance they provide.

And by the mercy of Allah (SWT) we have been blessed with a historical example, in Abu Huraira (RA).

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): People say that I have narrated many Hadiths. Had it not been for two verses in the Qur'an, I would not have narrated a single hadith, and the verses are: Verily those who conceal the clear sign and the guidance which We have sent down ... (up to) ... Most Merciful. (Qur'an 2:159-160)

This was the spirit and orientation of a close companion of the Prophet (SAW). The challenge of keeping within the boundaries was burdensome enough because of the fear of exceeding or being the excuse for exceeding. And both Imams Bukhari and his student Muslim followed in these footsteps. That is why the collection of Bukhari is accorded the superior status of the first best reference after the Qur'an.

And Abu Huraira (RA) was not only cautious but very much so, in order not to either mislead or divide the believers.

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): I have memorized two kinds of knowledge from Allah's Apostle (SAW). I have propagated one of them to you and if I propagated the second, then my pharynx (throat) would be cut (i.e. killed).

What have been propagated is known, like the difference between Wajib and Haram. What have not been are not known and they are difficult to bear to the point of attracting opposition to him. It is uncommon. Of course it will be attractive BUT what is the certainty of its safety (when it is commonly available) for whatever is deduced or assumed to be rightly belonging to the knowledge? This was a close companion who neither traded in the market nor worked on farmland but was contented with whatever the Messenger of Allah (SAW) could provide him. And when he complained of having forgotten some things he had learnt, Rasul (SAW) with the grace of Allah (SWT) recovered him fully.

This leads us to WARNINGS against excesses or transgressions that were the fears that guarded Abu Huraira (RA), Imams Bukhari and Muslim, as examples.

Narrated Ali (RA): The Prophet (SAW) said, “Do not tell a lie against me for whoever tells a lie against me (intentionally) then he will surely enter the Hellfire.”

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) does not need further assistance after him, beyond what he had completely set down. This is followed by another security guide.

Narrated Anas (RA): The Prophet (SAW) said, “None of you will have faith till he loves me more than his father, his children and all mankind.”

It will as a result be misleading if not straying, to even equally love any other person like the Rasul (SAW). The experience of Umar (RA) was a good pointer. When he expressed half of his love and more to the Messenger of Allah (SAW), it was not enough for his faith until Rasul (SAW) came above all.

This burden for the knowledgeable leads to logical challenges, to keep within the standard limits of guidance.

Narrated Hudhaifa ibn Al-Yaman (RA): I said, “O Allah’s Apostle (SAW)! We were living in ignorance and in an extremely worst atmosphere, then Allah (SWT) brought us this good (i.e. Islam), will there be any evil after this good?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Will there be any good after that evil?” He replied, “Yes, but it will be tainted (not pure).” I asked, “What will be its taint?” He replied, “(There will be) some people who will guide others not according to my tradition. You will approve of some of their deeds and disapprove of some others.”

Thus, it is not only a personal challenge to every believer but more or especially so for the religious leaders, to distinguish. It will be sheepish for a believer to simply find comfort in leaving all the burden of what is appropriate guidance in the hands of a leader. The standard has been set and everybody is questionable on and for what is not clear. Rasul (SAW) is not to be replaced by any believer.

Another challenge, relates to not breaking the Ummah.

Narrated Abu Dharr (RA): I heard the Prophet (SAW) saying, “If somebody accuses another of *Fusuq* (by calling him *Fasiq* i.e. a wicked person) or accuses him of *Kufr* (i.e. disbelieve), such an accusation will revert to him (i.e. the accuser) if his companion (the accused) is innocent.”

Narrated Thabit ibn Ad-Dahhak (RA): The Prophet (SAW) said, “ ... and cursing a believer is like murdering him, and whoever accuses a believer of disbelief then it is as if he had killed him.”

The caution cannot be greater especially against our common experience by some exuberant religious teachers/leaders in this country. And the eventual gravity of erring from the middle path that is the straight path is not hidden.

Narrated Abdullah (RA): The Prophet (SAW) said, “I am your predecessor at the lake – Fount (Kauthar) – and some men amongst you will be brought to me when I will try to hand them some water, they will be pulled away from me by force whereupon I will say, ‘O Lord, my companions!’ Then the Almighty will say, ‘You do not know what they did after you left, they introduced new things into the religion after you.’”

Inescapably, the knowledgeable, the learned, the scholars are the only hanger for keeping within the limits, for remaining on the middle path that is the straight path. And while every believer has the personal duty and responsibility to acquire religious knowledge, the leaders in this respect have an enormous duty and responsibility for the proper guidance of the Ummah. And because religion in Islam is the basis for entire livelihood, it will be insufficient to provide the Ummah only on religious rites.

This foundation poses related critical challenges to the *Ulama* of Nigeria. The first is that, what is right and clearly defined is agreeable upon by all parties, irrespective of whatever differences any party may associate with another party. Declaration for admission into the fold of Islam is the same. The requirements, structure and procedure of salat cannot be mixed up. The portions for charity are not for adjustments. The fasting in the month of Ramadan will remain compulsory. And for whoever is able to perform the Pilgrimage, the rites and procedures are the same. The bases of these and for these are the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (SAW). Therefore, whatever differences may arise in OTHER AREAS are EXPLAINABLE by the bearers and leaders of such differences TO WHOEVER IS INTERESTED.

For the Ummah of Nigeria, every believer is entitled to this clarity of identity. The present situation where the followers of the different leaders that at times even openly criticize one another is not worthy of the duty and responsibility of seeking for knowledge to establish the truth on each believer and especially the leaders. The scholars will need to champion this clarity to the followers and others. This will earn admissible difference deserving respect. And it will free unsatisfied followers from the train, blindly. In consequence, the spirit of animalism driving ignorant believers will be drastically reduced. This is because Islam is not for fools or thugs. And it is the basis of making the personal search for and knowing Allah (SWT) compulsory. The Qur'an goes further to challenge disputers **IF THEY HAVE TRIED LIVING ISLAM AND FOUND IT TO BE UNTRUE.**

For example, an Ahmadi Muslim should clearly know, appreciate his differences with an Izala or Tariqa believer. Even a Shi'ite that is more politically oriented than religious, should know and be known for what he is. The necessary beneficial fallout will be that miscreants who can only mobilize ignorant followership and are equally ignorant of the Qur'an and Sunnah can be easily weeded out. The Ummah will be saved of this avoidable hazard. And this is a **NECESSARY** duty or obligation resting on all. Such ambitious miscreants can easily be discovered and avoided at will by individual believers. And the real scholars will soundly disprove them.

This cannot be sustained with the common fashion of religious enlightenment only in the month of Ramadan. Indeed, intermittent public lectures will need to be structured or ordered towards realizing an improved clarification of the total perspective of Islam from the standpoint of the scholars or respective leaders. This was what led to the foundation TAFSIRS we now use today. The Tariqa of Tijjaniyya is for instance blessed with a Tafsir of one of its leaders. But how many

members and even seniors are conversant with it? How many use it? How many have or are using it, to brighten or relive the experience of the leader of their differences? The Izala have closely gotten the Tafsir by late Qadi Mahmoud Gumi. But what is its level of availability and use among the members? It is inconsequential and backward to be drumming that the Qadi did it when it is in no use or reference. The NECESSITY for this rests in the historical responsibility for scholars to establish the continuous relevance of Islam to changing times – ALONG WITH THE NON NEGOTIABLE PROVISIONS.

It is this action and response that will check the IRRESPONSIBLE DIVISION OF THE UMMAH. And in our case, safety from much worse tendencies, because of our general ignorance and carelessness.

This will be the most responsible way for living the best model for mankind, who enjoin good and forbid evil. And as fellow Nigerians, with Christians the respectable window of respect, association and collaboration will be built. A priest will not be suggesting what is in the forbidden region to be adopted or hesitate to support what is common to both. Indeed our leaders in politics and business will have the necessary bearing for building a better and stronger society for the prosperity of all.

The limits that we must keep have been well defined and we need not generate creations or innovations within the limits.

And in this course, the leaderships in structured institutions like Islamic universities, Centres, Schools or Courses have no less duty or responsibilities compared to Imams of mosques, Missionaries or Ramadan month Teachers. The much larger and influential class of Teachers in the informal sector like Almajiri

schools etc. are to equally bear the burden of this CONTINUOUS CLEARING FOR THE STRAIGHT PATH THAT IS THE MIDDLE PATH.