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## Sūrah al-Ma'idah: Some Lessons for Muslim Business Leaders

### *Sūrah al-Ma'idah*: Beberapa Pengajaran untuk Pemimpin Perniagaan Muslim

Rodrigue Fontaine\*

#### **Abstract**

Previous studies have looked at *sūrah al-Baqarah*, *sūrah Āli-'Imrān*, and *sūrah An-Nisa'* from an Islamic management perspective. The conclusion from previous studies was that Muslim business leaders can develop organisations that have a positive organisational culture, a neutral organisational culture, or a negative organisational culture. This study builds on this foundation by looking at what insights can be gained from *sūrah al-Ma'idah* in relation to building an Islamic corporate culture. The works of Khaled and Khan are compared. A group of MBA students was given a draft of this study and they shared their reflections on this *sūrah*. Two key facts stand out. First, although there are a number of Islamic rulings in this *sūrah*, there is a lot of emphasis on having *taqwā* and being grateful. Much of the reflections of the MBA students focused on the importance of *taqwā* and good manners at the workplace. Second, this *sūrah* is one of the last *sūrah* revealed and it clarifies the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims.

**Keywords:** Qur'an, Islamic management, *sūrah al-Ma'idah*.

#### **Abstrak**

Kajian terdahulu telah melihat kepada *sūrah al-Baqarah*, *sūrah Āli-'Imrān* dan *sūrah An-Nisa'* dari perspektif Pengurusan Islamik. Kesimpulan daripada kajian terdahulu menunjukkan bahawa pemimpin perniagaan Muslim boleh membangunkan organisasi yang mempunyai budaya organisasi yang positif, budaya organisasi yang neutral atau budaya organisasi yang negatif. Asas kajian ini dibina dengan melihat apa pengajaran yang boleh diperolehi daripada *sūrah al-Ma'idah* dalam membina sebuah budaya organisasi islamik. Hasil kerja Khaled dan Khan dibandingkan. Sekumpulan pelajar MBA telah diberi draf bagi kajian ini dan mereka telah berkongsi refleksi mereka terhadap *sūrah* ini. Dua perkara yang menonjol. Pertama, walaupun terdapat banyak ketetapan islam dalam *sūrah* ini, terdapat banyak penekanan terhadap *taqwa* dan sifat

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berterima kasih. Kebanyakan refleksi pelajar-pelajar MBA memfokuskan kepentingan taqwa dan akhlak yang baik di tempat kerja. Kedua, surah ini merupakan antara surah-surah terakhir yang diturunkan dan ia menerangkan hubungan antara muslim dan bukan muslim.

**Kata Kunci:** Qur'an, Pengurusan Islamik, *sūrah al-Ma'idah*.

### Introduction

This study relates to Islamic management. It is defined as, “*the efforts made by Muslim business leaders to create organisations whose corporate culture reflects the Qur'an and the Sunnah.*” It is not concerned with increasing productivity or sales. A manager, by the nature of his position has control and the ability to shape how he himself and his subordinates behave. The Quran provides important guidance as to how a manager should behave and the work environment he can create. Thus, Muslim business leaders need to develop insights into the Qur'an. These insights must be consistent with the text. Studies on *sūrah al-Baqarah*<sup>1</sup>, *sūrah Āli-Imrān*<sup>2</sup>, and *sūrah An-Nisā*<sup>3</sup> have been completed. In the study of *sūrah al-Baqarah*, the conclusion was reached that Muslims business leaders have an enormous amount of power to shape the culture of the organisation that they lead. Organisational culture was classified into three categories<sup>4</sup>:

1. *Positive organizational culture:* This kind of culture helps employees to strengthen their Islamic identity.
2. *Neutral organizational culture:* This kind of culture does not help or hinder employees from developing their Islamic identity.
3. *Negative organizational culture:* This kind of culture prevents employees from developing their Islamic identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodrigue Fontaine, “Some Management Lessons in *Sūrah al-Baqarah* Based on the Works of Khaled (n.d.) and Khan (2012)”, *International Journal of Economics, Management, and Accounting* 25, no 1, (2017): 105-123.

<sup>2</sup> Rodrigue Fontaine, “Some Management Lessons from *Sūrah Āli-Imrān* Based on the Works of Khaled and Khan”, *International Journal of Economics, Management and Accounting* 25, no 3, (2017): 581-600.

<sup>3</sup> Rodrigue Fontaine, “*Sūrah An-Nisā*: Some Lessons for Muslim Business Leaders Based on the Works of Khaled and Khan”, *Journal of Islam in Asia* 15, no 3, (2018): 315-336.

<sup>4</sup> Fontaine, *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, p. 116

This study builds on this previous effort and focuses on *sūrah al-Ma'idah*. Over the last 1,400 years, hundreds of scholars have studied and explained this *sūrah*. They have often used the same methodology – that is explaining the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān, quoting relevant narrations and then relying on the rules of Arabic grammar. Recent studies of the Qur'ān have put a lot of emphasis on coherence in the Qur'ān.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this is an attempt at summarising these studies on *sūrah al-Ma'idah* and presenting them to an audience interested in management.

### Methodology

This research is based on the *tawhidic* paradigm, which assumes that every science should be aligned with the aims and the principles of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Due to the length of this *sūrah*, a comprehensive analysis is not possible. This is a limitation to this study. This author will summarize the explanation of Dr Amr Khaled<sup>6</sup> and Nouman Ali Khan Khan<sup>7</sup>. Both preachers who adopt a contemporary in their explanation of the Quran and may appeal more easily to the modern business leaders<sup>8</sup>. Both preachers tend to summarize the work of classical scholars but present their ideas in a manner that makes the Qur'ān relevant to ordinary Muslims. By contrasting the explanations of both preachers, a critical perspective of the text can be presented. This point needs to be emphasised. It is easy to find translations of the Qur'ān. However, the Arabic text can be translated and interpreted in multiple ways. By reading only one interpretation, one is limiting one's understanding to the opinion of one person. By having two interpretations of the same text, one can compare and contrast the two.

After writing a draft, the paper was given to a group of 12 part-time postgraduate management students to get their inputs and reflections.

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<sup>5</sup> Mir, M. *Thematic and Structural Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Islahi's Concept of "Nazm"*. (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, UMI Dissertations, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Khaled, A. *Qur'ānic Reflections: Insights into the objectives of the Qur'ānic verses* (Cairo: AmrKhaled.Net, N.D.).

<sup>7</sup> Khan, N.A., "Surah al-Ma'idah", *Concise Commentary*, www.Bayyinah.Tv, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Private communication from Mr. Fazrul Ismail, the CEO of Akademi Sinergi Ikhlas, a Malaysian company that teaches Qur'an to business leaders.

### Khaled

Khaled says that this is a *sūrah* with 120 *āyat*. It is the only *sūrah* in the Qur'ān that starts with “*O you who have believed*”. This expression recurs 16 times in this *sūrah*. The main objective of the *sūrah* is laid out in the opening *āyah*, “*O you who have believed, fulfil your contracts*”. It contains the last *āyat* concerning Islamic legislation. It can be considered the *sūrah* of permissibility and prohibitions. The main ideas, each involving dimensions of permissibility and prohibitions include,

1. Food, drink, quarry and slaughter.
2. Family and marriage.
3. Faith and expiation (i.e. prescribed acts performed in repentance of doing an unlawful act).
4. Principles of worship.
5. Verdicts, judiciary rules, testimonies, and the realization of justice.
6. Organizing Muslim relations with other religions, namely with Jews and Christians.

A key theme is that the right to legislate belongs to Allah alone (5:44). Khaled notes that there is a gradual progression in the Qur'ān. In *sūrah al-Baqarah*, Muslims are told of man's responsibility on earth. In *sūrah Āli-Imrān*, Muslims are told to be steadfast and disciplined. In *sūrah An-Nisa*, Muslims are encouraged to have justice and compassion for the weak. In *sūrah al-Ma'idah*, Muslims are told to implement Islamic laws. Khaled explains that there are sixteens calls in this *sūrah*. These are,

1. Fulfil your contracts (5:01) – Allah then highlights that most things are lawful
2. Do not change the features of Allah's religion in terms of orders and prohibitions (5:02). These features include justice, cooperation and *taqwā*
3. Purify yourself spiritually (5:06)
4. Justice and tolerance (5:08)
5. Remember Allah's favours on you. He fulfils His promises to humanity so humanity should fulfil its' promises to Him (5:11). Do not make the same mistakes that Bani Israel made.
6. Strive in the cause of Allah (5:35)
7. Do not take Jews and Christians as allies (5:51)
8. Do not turn your back on Islam (5:54)
9. Do not associate with those who make fun of Islam (5:57)
10. Do not prohibit what Allah has made lawful (5:87)

11. Stay away from alcohol and gambling (5:90)
12. You will be tested with regards to permissible things (5:94)
13. You will be tested with regards to impermissible things (5:95)
14. Do not make things harder for yourself (5:101)
15. Do not imitate bad behaviour (5:105)
16. Make testimonies and bequest lawful (5:106)

With regards to 7, 8, and 9, Khaled says that Islamic law strikes a balance between being tolerant of other religions and maintaining a clear Islamic identity. Thus, 5:44, 5:45, 5:47 and 5:50 relate to judging by a ruling that Allah has not revealed. He argues that Muslims are likely to ignore Islamic law when they become impressed with other beliefs systems and Muslim start “blindly imitating” their lifestyle. Khaled summarises this *sūrah* by reviewing the five objectives of Islamic law: the protection of religion, the protection of life, the protection of the intellect, the protection of honour and lineage, and the protection of wealth.

### Khan

Khan says this *sūrah* is the fourth of the big *sūrah* revealed after the Prophet’s arrival in Madinah. It is last *sūrah* to be revealed. *Sūrah al-Baqarah* laid out the vision of Islam, *sūrah Āli-‘Imrān* dealt mainly with the external threats, and *sūrah an-Nisa’* dealt with the internal social problems. This *sūrah* puts the finishes touches on Islamic law and clarifies the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The first *āyah* is critical. Allah says, “*O you who have believed, fulfil [all] contracts.*” The word for contract (*al-‘uqud*) refers to a knot as a contract ties people together. This refers to all written, verbal and implied contracts, including business contracts, social norms and religious obligations. Contracts are broken in two ways. One, by being excessive and going too far in something (e.g. like speeding on the highway). Two, being deficient and not meeting the minimum requirement (e.g. like driving too slowly on the highway).

Having liberated Mecca, the Muslims were now in a position to abuse their power. So Allah warns the Muslims, “*And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from al-Masjid al-Haram lead you to transgress. And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty*” (5:02). Allah continues with an *āyah* whose key point is the phrase. “*This day I have perfected (akmaltu) for you your religion and*

*completed (atmamtu) My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as your deen*" (5:03).

The word "*akmaltu*" means that one started something some time ago (i.e. the declaration to worship Allah alone), one worked very hard for a long time (i.e. struggling for Allah), and now one is the benefits of that hard-work (i.e. the liberation of Mecca). The word "*atmamtu*" means that nothing needs to be added to the religion. This is a recurring theme in this *sūrah*.

Khan says that Muslims sometimes miss the point regarding permissibility and prohibitions. There is a spiritual benefit in what is permissible and there is a spiritual harm in what is prohibited. Allah says that all good things have been made permissible (5:04), including the food of the People of the Book (5:05). Khan notes that something might be permissible but it might not be wise. Sugar is permissible but if one is diabetic, too much sugar can be harmful. One has to investigate the situation in a case by case fashion. In the middle of these *āyat* on permissibility and prohibitions, Allah mentions disbelief. This indicates that not taking permissibility and prohibitions seriously can become a form of disbelief (5:05).

Allah switches to establishing the prayers. He says, "*Allah does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favour upon you that you may be grateful*" (5:06). The rules of Islamic law should not be seen as a burden but as acts that purify individuals. One should see Islamic law as a favour given to humanity and one should feel grateful. In *sūrah an-Nisa'*, there is an emphasis on dealing rightly towards people. In *sūrah al-Ma'idah*, the emphasis is on dealing rightly towards Allah.

Allah tells the believers to "*persistently stand up for Allah, witnesses to justice (qist)*" (5:8). Khan notes that the empathic form is used that indicates that believers stand up repeatedly for justice. There are two words for justice in the Qur'ān, *qist* and '*adl*. *Qist* is when one feels morally obligated to do what is just. '*Adl* refers to a dispute that is settled in a court of law. Both are important but morality is emphasised in this *āyah*. Allah has put the love for justice in the nature of all people. However, Allah wants the believers to stand up for justice (*qist*) for His sake. The hatred for other people should not prevent one from being just ('*adl*). At least, one must meet the minimum standard of justice that can stand in court. In this *sūrah*, justice is tied to protecting oneself from disobeying Allah (*taqwa*).



Allah promises Paradise for those who believe and do good deeds (5:09) and Hellfire for those who disbelieve and deny His signs (5:10). Khan explains that in the context of these *āyat*, disbelief means not standing up for justice. To reinforce the point, Allah reminds the Muslims of Jewish history (5:12) and their breaking of the covenant with Allah. The Children of Israel forgot a portion of their book. As a consequence, Allah cursed them and made their hearts hard (5:13). The same thing happened to the Christians (5:14). These *āyat* serve as a warning to the Muslims so that they don't make the same mistakes.

The Qur'an guides people to multiple pathways that lead to peace (5:16). Allah criticises the belief that Isa is Christ (5:17) and He criticises the beliefs of the Jews who see themselves as beloved (5:18). Allah relates the story of Musa<sup>9</sup> when the Children of Israel were told to enter their homeland. They refused so Musa separated himself from them. Allah then relates the story of Abil and Qabil (5:27). The jealousy of Qabil led to the murder of his brother. Allah then says that killing one person is like killing the whole of humanity and saving the life of one person is like saving the life of all of humanity (5:32).

In 5:33, Allah seems to be sanctioning the taking of life. Khan explains that during most of the revelation, Muslims were in a defensive situation or in a position of weakness. Now Mecca has been liberated. By and large, this conquest has been done peacefully and the many injustices committed by the Quraysh were forgiven. However, some non-Muslims were still fighting so a harsh punishment was ordained for them. They were informed that if they continue fighting, they will be killed ruthlessly without any hesitation (5:33). Before this *āyah*, prisoners of wars were dealt with gently like at the battle of Badr. Maybe stubborn non-Muslims were tempted to continue the fight because they assumed that if they were caught, they would simply be tied up and ransomed. Now, they have been told that they will be ruthlessly killed. The purpose of this *āyah* is thus to end the fighting and to discourage further killing. This *āyah* cannot be applied today as it was limited to the situation immediately after the liberation of Mecca.

In the middle of these *āyat* about permissibility, prohibitions, and killing, there is a danger that Muslims forget why liberating Mecca was necessary. It was not about gaining power for the sake of power. It was to worship Allah properly. To remind the Muslims, Allah says

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<sup>9</sup> Peace be upon him

*“O you who have believed, fear Allah and seek the means [of nearness] to Him and strive in His cause that you may succeed.” (5:35)*

This *āyah* shows a progression in the spiritual transformation of an individual. First, the minimum is being fearful of displeasing Allah (i.e. *taqwa*). Next, Muslims do deeds to get closer to Him. Lastly, Muslims must strive their utmost in Allah’s cause. This *āyah* is important in the context of this *sūrah*. Allah is putting the finishing touches on Islamic law. The ultimate purpose of Islamic law is for Muslims to get closer to Allah. Allah adds some new rulings regarding the cutting of hands for thieves (5:38). Stealing was a common practice in those days and that the harshness of the penalty was necessary to break that cultural practice.

This is followed by two long *āyat* that describe the situation of the Muslims after the liberation of Mecca. Now that Islam is the dominant force, many people are converting but they are not sincere (5:41). Similarly, some of the Jews are still actively plotting against Islam (5:42). None of this should grieve the Prophet<sup>10</sup>. These two groups like to listen to falsehood and devour unlawful earnings (*suh't*). There are two words for prohibition in the Qur’ān. One is “*haram*”. It describes anything unlawful. The second is “*suh't*”. This is restricted to money that is earned unlawfully. The next group of *āyat* require some explanations. Allah says,

*“Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light. The prophets who submitted [to Allah] judged by it for the ordinary Jews, as did the spiritual Jews and the scholars by that with which they were entrusted of the Scripture of Allah, and they were witnesses thereto. So do not fear the people but fear Me, and do not sell My verses for a small price. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed - then it is those who are the disbelievers.” (5:44)*

In this *āyah*, three groups of people are mentioned – the common people, the spiritual people, and the scholar. Islamic law, if applied properly, is relevant for all three groups. But every ruling will make some people unhappy (i.e. “*do not fear the people*” in this *āyah*). Scholars and judges may be tempted to interpret the law in a manner that makes everyone happy (i.e. “*sell My verses for a small price*”) by finding

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<sup>10</sup> Throughout the text, the prayer “peace and blessing be upon him” is implied every time the Prophet is mentioned.

loopholes. The last part of the *āyah* – “*And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed – then it is those who are disbelievers*” – can be interpreted in two ways. The Arabic *kāfirun* can mean “disbeliever” or “ungrateful”. Khan interprets it to mean ungrateful. This last part of the *āyah* appears three times with a slight modification. In 5:44, abandoning Islamic law is being ungrateful. In 5:45, abandoning the law is injustice and the Children Israel is given as a case study. In 5:47, abandoning the law leads to corruption. Christianity is used as a case study because Christians believe that the coming of prophet Isa abrogated the need for divine laws.

In 5:48, Allah orders the Prophet to judge based on the *shir’ah wa minhaj*. *Shir’ah* comes from *shuru’* which means “beginning” and “journey that leads to water.” Khan says that “*when you start on a journey that will give you life, you are on the shariah*”. However, the *shariah* is just the beginning of one’s relationship with Allah, not the end. *Minhaj* implies that Allah shows the Prophet the complete and clear way to success. A detailed study of the life of the Prophet is therefore crucial to understand the *minhaj* to establish the *shariah*. Those Muslims turn away from Islamic law because of their sins.

In 5:50, Allah asks Muslims whether they prefer the judgment of *jahiliyah*. *Jahiliyah* can refer to pre-Islamic times but can also refer to judgments that are made based on strong emotions and desires. They are asked to remain humble to the believers, powerful against the disbelievers and resist social pressure (5:54). Allah says

*“Your ally is none but Allah and [therefore] His Messenger and those who have believed - those who establish prayer and give zakah, and they bow [in worship].” (5:55)*

Apart from Allah and His messenger, your allies are “*those who establish prayer and give zakah, and they bow [in worship]*”. Khan indicates that the original meaning of “bowing” is to be humble. These believers have a very humble attitude towards their religion. Due to their sincerity, they will be allies to other Muslims. Khan provides context to these *āyat*. In the early years, people converted to Islam in one or in pairs. They could get an in-depth Islamic education by pairing up with existing companions. However, at the end of the prophet’s life, one hundred thousand people converted within a period of 18 months. These strict guidelines – not to take disbelievers as allies – were necessary to prevent non-Islamic ideologies to become mixed up with the Islamic teachings in the minds of these new converts. Allah says,

*Why do the rabbis and religious scholars not forbid them from saying what is sinful and devouring what is unlawful (suh't)? How wretched is what they have been practicing. (5:63)*

Allah emphasises the evil role of religious scholars and preachers who condone the corrupt practices of influential people in society. The use of word *suh't* (unlawful earnings) suggests corrupt business leaders. Even though Mecca has been liberated and thousands of people have entered Islam, the Prophet is instructed to continue spreading the message of Islam (5:67). Allah criticises the false beliefs of the Trinity. A number of *āyat* describes the attitude of the People of the Book who did not prevent one another from evil. Turning back to the Muslims, Allah reveals a general principle,

*O you who have believed, do not prohibit the good things which Allah has made lawful to you and do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors. (5:87)*

Allah then reveals an *āyah* concerning the prohibition of alcohol and gambling (5:90). Then Allah says, *Say, "Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you." So fear Allah, O you of understanding, that you may be successful (5:100)*. This *āyah* indicates that when *haram* spreads, people can become desensitized and the *haram* become normal. Another critical *āyah* is when Allah says,

*And when it is said to them, "Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger," they say, "Sufficient for us is that upon which we found our fathers." Even though their fathers knew nothing, nor were they guided? (5:104)*

This *āyah* explains the mindset of people who refuse to abide by Islamic law. Their parents handed them down a culture and they simply follow it without thinking. In a modern context, people in many Muslim countries have mixed elements of Islam with elements from other cultures. The last *āyat* is a description of the Day of Judgment and the testimony of Isa ibn Maryam. The explanations of Khaled and Khan concerning this *sūrah* will be analysed.

### **Analysis**

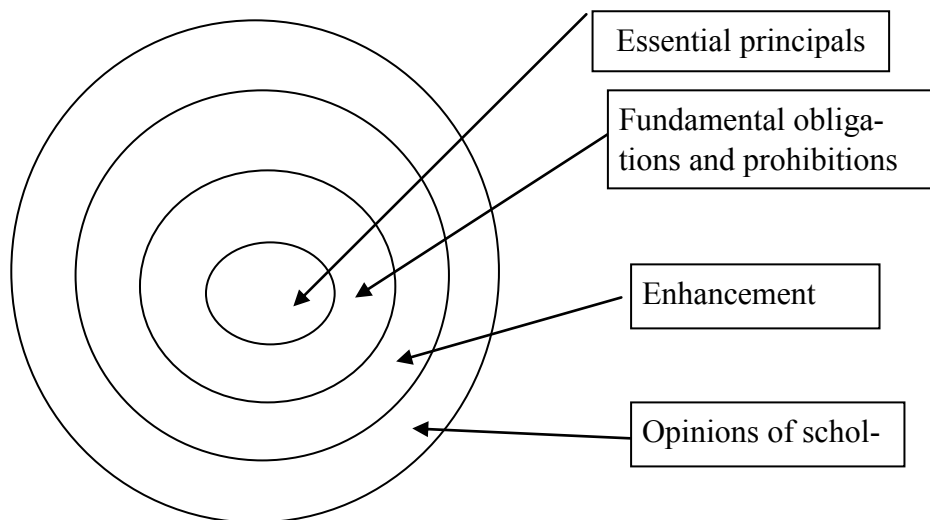
There are obvious differences between the explanations of Khaled and Khan. As far as the ordinary Muslims is concerned, this is a good thing. The ordinary Muslim might assume that a good explanation will accurately convey the Arabic text into English. In fact, such an accurate

translation is impossible. The benefit of reading two summaries of the same *sūrah* is that it indicates where differences of opinions are possible.

Khaled almost exclusively emphasised the legal aspect of this *sūrah*. Yet, as Khan shows, many of the *āyat* are more general. It sets the general policy of cooperation in righteousness between Muslims, and between Muslims and non-Muslims. Haleem<sup>11</sup> notes that normal relations between Muslims and non-Muslims is one of peace. Exceptionally, war is allowed within a strict ethical code of conduct. Certain *āyat* related to war should not be taken out of context. The aim is always to return to a peaceful situation. Tolerance is generally encouraged throughout the Qur'ān so that non-Muslims feel attracted to Islam. The matter of which religion was the right one will be settled on the Day of Judgment.

To better appreciate this *sūrah*, reference will be made to a video by Khan in which he explains the ideas of Muhammad Akram al-Nadwi.<sup>12</sup> Akram al-Nadwi proposes that one imagines four circles to visualize the Qur'an and Islamic law (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Visualizing the Qur'ān and Islamic Law



<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Abdel Haleem, M.A., *Understanding the Qur'ān: Themes and Style*, (London, I.B Tauris, 2011), 63-76.

<sup>12</sup> See Nouman Ali Khan Kahn "Essentials of Islam" on YouTube. These ideas were explained Rodrigue Fontaine, Khaliq Ahmad, and Gapur Oziev, *Islamic Leadership Today*, (Gombak, ICIFE, 2017), 265-266

The first two circles relate directly to the Qur'ān. In the first circle, Allah explains the essentials of the religion, that is what He expects from human beings. These expectations are abstract (e.g. “*so that you may be grateful*” or “*so that you think*”). These abstract concepts are often found in an *āyah* at the end of which there is an expression like “*so that*” or “*Allah loves*” or “*Allah is with...*”. These abstract expectations are linked to a specific obligation or prohibition. Thus Muslims are told to pray in order to be people of remembrance or to fast to develop *taqwā*. When reading the Qur'ān, it is thus very important to pay attention to the ending of *āyat* because they show the intention behind the obligation or the prohibition.

The third circle relate to enhancements to the religion. For example, after praying, one can recite a number of invocations. These enhancements are generally found in prophetic narrations.

The fourth circle relates to the opinions of scholars who discuss issues on which there is no textual evidence.

Khan, in this video, makes a number of observations about common mistakes that are found in different parts of the Muslim world. Khan argues that the Prophet invited people to the essentials of the religion first (first and second circle). When the people had accepted the essential teachings, the Prophet would give them extra things to enhance and beautify their religion. Unfortunately, some people mix the enhancements and the fundamental obligations. They start by teaching the enhancements as if they were obligations. This give the perception in the minds of some Muslims that Islam is a difficult religion.

The biggest problem, according to Khan, lies in the last circle. Scholars have different opinions on a number of issues. This difference of opinions arises for various reasons but scholars understand these reasons and therefore respect the opinions of other scholars. However, many people don't understand this and start attacking people who have different opinions than theirs. In doing so, they break a fundamental principle, that is to uphold the brotherhood of Islam.

In his presentation, Khan argues that keeping these circles in mind give Muslims a simple way to understanding the complexity of Islamic law – and paradoxically its' simplicity. Most arguments between Muslims arise due to misunderstandings or differences of opinions in circles three and four. By definitions, these are related to enhancements and legitimate differences of opinions and these are not worth arguing about. Clearly, scholars of Islamic law need to debate certain issues but this

should not lead to breaking up in factions, hating other Muslims, and breaking up the brotherhood of Islam.

Table 1 provides an overview of this *sūrah*. Table 1 highlights two things. First, the concept of *taqwā* is critical to this *sūrah*. Second, Allah wants Muslims to feel deeply grateful about Islamic law. Mere compliance is not enough. Allah wants Muslims to love Islamic law and realise how it simplifies their lives. This feeling of gratitude towards the lawgiver is often absent from the current discourse on Islamic law. Khaled described this *sūrah* as the *sūrah* of permissibility and prohibitions. This *sūrah* could maybe be better described as the *sūrah* of *taqwā*.

**Table 1:** Analysing *sūrah al-Ma'idah*

<i>Āyah</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>	<i>Order</i>	<i>La'ala</i>	<i>Allah Loves</i>
1	Fulfil contracts			
2	Dot not cooperate in sin and aggression	<i>taqwā</i>		
3	Prohibition of dead animals	fear Allah		
4	Lawful food	<i>taqwā</i>		
6	Allah does not intend difficulty but he wants to purify you and complete his favour on you		grateful	
7	Remember the favours of Allah	<i>taqwā</i>		
8	Stand firm for justice	<i>taqwā</i>		
11	Remember the favours of Allah when he withheld the hands of your enemies	<i>taqwā</i>		
35	Seek means to get closer to Allah	<i>taqwā</i>		
42	Judge with justice			The Just

44 to 47	Not judging according to Islamic law - disbelievers, wrong-doers, and disobedient			
57	Do not take as allies people who don't take their religion seriously	<i>taqwā</i>		
87	Do not prohibit good things that are lawful			He does not love transgressors
89	Expiation for broken oaths		grateful	
90	Avoid intoxicants and gambling		success	
93	No blame for what you have eaten in the past	<i>taqwā</i>		The good
96	Food in a state of ihram	<i>taqwā</i>		
100	Not equal are good and evil – people of albab	<i>taqwā</i>	success	
108	Testify truthfully	<i>taqwā</i>		

In the introduction to this study, the point was made that to have *taqwā*, Muslim business leaders and Muslim managers need to develop a positive organisational culture (i.e. the kind of culture that helps employees to strengthen their Islamic identity) or a neutral organisational culture (i.e. the kind of culture that does not help or hinder employees from developing their Islamic identity). At all cost, Muslim business leaders must avoid developing a negative organisational culture (i.e. the kind of culture that prevents employees from developing their Islamic identity). Additionally, Muslim business leaders must have a working knowledge of the higher objectives of Islamic law and of Islamic legal maxims.

Using figure 1 as a reference, one wants to avoid creating a corporate culture where the emphasis is on enhancements only but the fundamental principles are ignored. For example, some business leaders put



a lot of emphasis on an “Islamic” dress code but they continue to use interest-based loans to grow their business.

### **The relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims**

Apart from clarifying a number of Islamic rulings, this *sūrah* clarifies the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Allah says, *“And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from al-Masjid al-Haram lead you to transgress. And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty”* (5:02).

The life of the Prophet demonstrates this attitude. For example, before he became a prophet, a trader from Yemen had been cheated in a business transaction. He complained publicly and appealed to the honour and dignity of the Quraysh to give him justice. Ibn Judan invited all the chiefs of tribes and clans and they all pledged to intervene in any conflict and always side with the oppressed. This alliance was known as the Pact of the Virtuous. Later, after Muhammad became a prophet, he told his companions, *“I was present in Abdullah ibn Judan’s house when a pact was concluded, so excellent that I would not exchange my part for it even for a herd of red camels, and if now, in Islam, I was asked to take part in it, I would be glad to accept”*<sup>13</sup>. By doing so, the Prophet acknowledged that the pursuit of justice is of utmost importance. He established the validity of a pact established by non-Muslims seeking justice for the common good of the society.

In another example, the Prophet allowed the Muslims to emigrate to Abyssinia because he trusted the Christian king there. To go to Madinah, the Prophet hired a non-Muslim guide. Ramadan concluded that *“he established his relationships in the name of trust and the respect of principles and not exclusively on the basis of similar religious affiliation. His Companions had understood this as well and they did not hesitate to develop solid ties with non-Muslims in the name of kinship or friendship, on the basis of mutual respect and trust, even in perilous situations”*<sup>14</sup>. Ramadan notes that *“Muhammad kept distinguishing between situations and the people involved in them.”* For example, although the relationship with Jewish tribes was deteriorating, a young Jewish boy accompanied

<sup>13</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *The Messenger: The Meanings of the life of Muhammad*, (London, Penguin Books, 2007), 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.72

the Prophet everywhere because he loved his company. The Prophet never asked him to abandon his faith. The boy fell ill and the boy embraced Islam on his deathbed. While he was alive though, he had enjoyed the Prophet's love and regard<sup>15</sup>.

These stories are significant because the reality of business is that Muslims and non-Muslims must interact all the time. The fact is that Islamic law allows such interactions and that the Prophet demonstrated the proper manners when dealing with non-Muslims provides Muslims with clear guidelines.

### **An Experiment**

From May 2019 to August 2019, the author taught a group of 12 part-time postgraduate management students. These were Muslims in their late 20s and early 30s. The majority were Malaysians. Most of them had at least five years of working experience. The majority worked in the banking sector. This sample is interesting because it represents<sup>16</sup> the educated urban Malays that is prevalent in Malaysian industry.

In the first week, a draft of the paper was circulated to the students. As part of their coursework, they had to read the paper, discuss it in class, and keep a semester-long diary. Keeping a diary allows students to ponder over a text throughout the semester and relate the content of the text to their working environment. Research shows that without a diary, respondents experience events but they are easily forgotten so they are generally unable to learn from them<sup>17</sup>.

In the second, week, students were asked to give their preliminary impressions. It was clear from the discussion that before embarking on this assignment, nobody had thought about this *sūrah*. The Malaysian students might have read the *sūrah* without understanding as part of their regular reading of the Qur'ān. The Arab-speaking students understood

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90

<sup>16</sup> The idea of finding a representative sample is a perennial problem in management research. Participants can be asked to become respondents (i.e. "what does this concept mean to you") or informants (i.e. "what does this concept mean to people in your community"). Using people as informants has two major advantages. First, it reduces the problem of respondents giving socially desirable answers. Second, it eliminates the need for a representative sample. See Ran Bijav Narayan Sinha and Arif Hassan, "Respondents Versus Informants Method of Data Collection: Implication for Business Research", *Multilingual Academic Journal of Education and Social Sciences* vol. 2, no 1, (2014), 1-13. .

<sup>17</sup> Rodrigue Fontaine, "The Psychology of Preaching: The Power of Diaries", *Al-Shajarah* vol. 20, no. 1, (2015), 27-52.

the words but had never pondered over the deeper meaning or consulted an exegesis. In the discussion, the conversation focused on the importance and correct definition of *taqwā*. The consensus was that the common definition of *taqwā* is always translated as the “fear of Allah”. The instructor said that this definition was misleading and that he would give an overall presentation on the concept of *taqwā* in the following week.

In the third week, the instructor presented two narrations. In the first, the Prophet said, “*Have taqwā of Allah wherever you are. Follow up a bad deed with a good deed and it will wipe it out. And behave towards the people with a good character.*” This narration is reported by at-Thirmidhi and it has been classified as *hasan lighairihi* by al-Albaani and others<sup>18</sup>.

The instructor then quoted some of the commentary on this narration. *Taqwā* is one of the most fundamental concepts in Islam. The essence is to guard oneself from disobeying Allah. As human beings, they will commit sins but they will try to rectify their situation. The last part of the narration is crucial. It implies that one cannot have *taqwā* if one neglects the rights of other people<sup>19</sup>. The instructor summed up this narration by saying that *taqwā* means “*protecting yourself of disobeying Allah by protecting the rights of Allah and protecting the rights of people*”.

The instructor then presented another narration to illustrate the importance of having good character towards the people. The Prophet said, “*Whoever relieves a believer’s distress of the distressful aspects of this world Allah will rescue him from a difficulty from the difficulties of the Hereafter. Whoever alleviates (the situation) of one in dire straits who cannot repay his debt, Allah will alleviate his lot in both this world and the Hereafter. Whoever (conceals the faults) of a Muslim, Allah will conceal (his faults) in this life and the Hereafter. Allah is helping the servant as long as the servant is helping his brother... [until the end of the hadith]*<sup>20</sup>”. This is recording by Muslim. After this presentation, the students discussed the implications of the presentation.

In the fourth week, the discussed focused on Figure 1. The class generally thought that the explanations in the paper was not very clear. The class watched the video together and then discussed the content. The

<sup>18</sup> Jamaal al-Din M. Zarabozo, *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of Al-Nawawi*, (Boulder, CO, Al-Basheer Publications and Translations, 1999), 695.

<sup>19</sup> Zarabozo, 1999, pp. 699 to 721. There is a long quote on p.721 that was discussed in detail.

<sup>20</sup> Zarabozo, 1999, p. 1310.

class agreed that many speakers in Malaysia focused heavily on the third circle (i.e. the enhancements) and this created confusion in the community. There was also an agreement that the last circle created a lot of disagreements because most Muslims don't really understand the roles of Muslim scholars and the discretion they have when there is no textual evidence. The point that Khan was making is that disagreements violate the principle of upholding the brotherhood of Islam. The instructor concluded that Figure 1 was useful but less important than a proper definition of *taqwā*.

In the fifth week, the instructor revisited the narration on *taqwā* and emphasized the last part, namely "*behave towards the people with good character*". The participants were asked to spend the next week observing what happens in their workplace and to give examples of good behaviour or bad behaviour at the workplace. In the following (and final week), the discussion revolved around the problem of professionalism at the workplace. A number of issues was raised – such as inappropriate behaviour at work. Another issue was the fact that when female colleagues report issues to the human resource department, people from the HR department put pressure on the complainant to retract their complaint.

Overall, the instructor had mixed feelings about the experiment. On the one hand, they had virtually zero knowledge of this *sūrah* before starting the experiment. By the end of it, they had an overall picture of the entire *sūrah* and they could relate some of the concepts to their everyday working life. On the other hand, as a group, we barely touched on the feeling of gratitude that Muslims should have towards Islamic law that is highlighted in the 6<sup>th</sup> *āyah*. It was very obvious that most participants found the process of reflecting on the Qur'ān something unusual and uncomfortable. However, as the weeks progressed, they became more and more used to that exercise. The instructor concluded that reflecting on the Qur'ān is a skill than can be developed through regular practice.

### Discussion

In the opening paragraph, the author summarised the findings of previous studies. In particular, Muslim business leaders have an enormous amount of power to create a positive organisational culture, a neutral organisational culture, or a negative organisational culture. This *sūrah* shows that an Islamic organisational culture must be based on a solid foundation of *taqwā*. This understanding of *taqwā* must be based on

three principles: respecting the rights of Allah, respecting the rights of Muslims stakeholders, and respecting the rights of non-Muslim stakeholders. One of the key characteristics of *taqwa* is good behaviour towards others. In practice, developing this *taqwa* is an on-going process that requires observing what happens every day and writing these reflections in a diary. In the last session, the instructor presented the following analogy. The Qur'ān is like a mirror. Every Muslim have to observe their personal flaws and work on themselves, to eliminate their own flaws. The Qur'ān should not be used as a weapon to attack other people.

### Conclusions

This study was part of a series of studies that included a review of *sūrah al-Baqarah*, *sūrah Āli-Imrān*, *sūrah An-Nisā*, and now *sūrah al-Ma'idah*. Each study was premised on the assumption that Muslim business leaders have an enormous amount of power to shape the culture of their organisation. The nature of this organizational culture was ambiguous. This study enables the author to offer an initial proposition.

Each *sūrah* has multiple themes that are interwoven. At the same time, each *sūrah* has a key word that seems repeated throughout the *sūrah*. These are,

- In *sūrah al-Baqarah*, a recurrent theme is faith (*iman*). Throughout the surah, hearts are being mentioned.
- In *sūrah Āli-Imrān*, a recurrent theme is submission. Many people know the truth but refuse to submit because they might lose a worldly gain. Submission in Arabic is *Islam*. A Muslim is not necessarily one who submits himself to Allah and His Messenger.
- In *sūrah An-Nisā*, a recurrent theme is being good to people (*ihsan*).
- In *sūrah al-Ma'idah*, a recurring theme is *taqwa* and good behaviour towards others.

The logical conclusion is that to build a positive organizational culture, the core values must be based on faith, submission to all Islamic principles, good dealings with all stakeholders (i.e. employees, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders), and *taqwa*. These values must simply be put on posters but they must be lived, day in, day out. To this end, the organization can develop processes that enable managers to encourage their subordinates to develop the skill of reflecting on the Qur'ān.

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