

Guiding Principles from Sūrah Al-Kahf For the Development of The Islamic Identity of Muslim Youth

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Abstract

This study aims to derive guiding principles from Sūrah al-Kahf for Muslim youth to preserve and develop their Islamic identity. An inductive approach was used to analyse the four major narratives of the sūrah: the companions of the cave, the companion of the two gardens, Mūsa and Khidr, and the narrative of Dhū al-Qarnayn. Through this process, the study extracted seven guiding principles for developing the Islamic identity of Muslim youth. These guiding principles deal specifically with the major threats faced by Muslim youth in preserving their Islamic identity. Through the first narrative, the companions of the cave, four guiding principles were extracted relating to the threats of peer pressure, assimilation, and Islamophobia. The second narrative of the companion of the two gardens provided a principle in dealing with materialism and corrupt desires. The third narrative of Mūsa and Khidr was the source of a principle dealing with the threats of religious doubt and the loss of religion in society. The fourth and final narrative of Dhū al-Qarnayn personified the application of all the previous principles illustrating the importance of providing Muslim youth with an exemplary role model. These seven guiding principles provide applicable solutions that can be used to protect and develop the Islamic identity against specific threats. This study serves as a crucial step in finding solutions to the challenges and threats faced by Muslim youth in preserving their Islamic identity. If followed sincerely, these principles can empower Muslim youth by transforming them into confident and successful leaders through their Islamic identity, ensuring their success in this world and the hereafter.

Keywords: Sūrah al-Kahf, Islamic identity, Muslim youth, Protection

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Introduction

The guidance of the Qur’ān is timeless and *Sūrah al-Kahf* is filled with relevant knowledge in developing and protecting the Islamic identity. It is recommended to be read weekly as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

“Whoever recites *Sūrah al-Kahf* on Friday will have a light between this Friday and the next.” (Saḥīḥ Muslim, Ḥadīth no. 257)

Not only is this *sūrah* everlastingly relevant but it is also prescribed to be memorized and internalized during times of extreme tribulations as the Prophet, (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

“If anyone learns by heart the first ten verses of the *Sūrah al-Kahf*, he will be protected from the Dajjal.” (Al-Bayhaqī, Ḥadīth no. 5996).

The four narratives in *Sūrah al-Kahf* contribute to the development of the Islamic identity and its three characteristics: internal submission, external actions, and following an example or leader. The first narrative of the companions of the cave, demonstrates specifically how youth can uphold and develop their identities in the most difficult of times and circumstances. The second narrative of The Companion of the Two Gardens reflects the trials and temptations of materialism as a significant threat to the Islamic identity. The third narrative of Mūsā and Khidr (peace be upon them) signifies the value and importance of sound knowledge which is essential to fulfilling the second tenet of the Islamic identity, righteous actions. Finally, the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn portrays the importance of sound and sincere leadership along with its potential impact. These four narratives in *Sūrah al-Kahf* possess a wealth of guidance related to the Islamic identity. Appropriate research must be undertaken to extract principles providing a practical framework for identity development. That is precisely what this study aims to do by deriving guiding principles from *Sūrah al-Kahf* for the development of the Islamic identity of Muslim youth.

Problem Statement

As the Muslim *ummah* (global community) today faces challenges on both micro and macro levels, this characterization of Islamic identity is crucial.

Arguably, it is the subset population of the youth, especially as minorities, who face the greatest threats to their identities (Omar, 2016, p.26). The external pressures faced by the Muslim community, specifically the youth in the formation and preservation of their Islamic identity, are tremendous. In Canada, for example, Asmahan Mansour, an 11-year-old Muslim girl, was ejected from a soccer tournament simply for wearing the *ḥijāb* (a Muslim headscarf or veil) (Omar, 2016, p.26). Similarly, a group of girls were expelled from a martial arts tournament in Montreal for wearing a headscarf (Omar, 2016, p.26). Most recently, the Quebec Federation of Taekwondo insisted on banning headscarves under helmets for all competitors (Omar, 2016, p.26). These notions of misguided anxiety towards Muslims are experienced by many Muslim youth. Of these, the most prevalent are racism, Islamophobia, and peer pressure (Zine, 2001, p.404).

There has been an abundance of research on Muslim minorities residing in Western liberal democracies, particularly after the events of 9/11. While the concept of identity construction along with the pressures and challenges faced by Muslim youth has been repeatedly addressed, little research has been done to build on this. In relation to the Islamic identity, this study aims to analyse a *sūrah* from the most vital source of guidance for Muslims, the Qur'ān.

Until now, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there has not been any specific study attempting to extract guiding principles of Islamic identity development as outlined in *Sūrah al-Kahf*. This study will attempt to extricate these principles from one of the most important and relevant *suwar* (plural of *sūrah*) of the Qur'ān, especially for Muslim youth. It will attempt to methodologically lay the foundation of identity development for Muslim minorities that could be cemented through future research.

Research Questions

- 1) What principles are presented in *Sūrah al-Kahf* that enable the development of the Islamic identity?

- 2) How can these principles offer solutions to the main challenges faced by Muslim youth in developing their Islamic Identity?

Research Objectives

- 1) To extract guiding principles from *Sūrah al-Kahf* to preserve and develop the Islamic identity.
- 2) To present these guiding principles in a context that could help Muslim youth to preserve and develop their Islamic identity.

Research Methodology

The methodology of this research study is critical to its ability to present effective and relevant findings. An analytical method will be used to examine *Sūrah al-Kahf* itself. This will be done by gathering, comparing, and analysing the discussions of *mufassirūn* (scholars of Qur'ānic exegesis) in both classical and modern books of *tafsīr* (exegesis of the Qur'ān). Research of *tafāsīr* (books of Qur'ānic exegesis) and related commentaries will provide the material needed to absorb completely the intricacies of this *sūrah*. This extensive and exhaustive process will identify and extract principles that can serve to guide the development of the Islamic identity in different contexts. Through this, the research objectives will be met not only by building on previous works but also by contributing to the development of a vital and often overlooked construct, the Islamic identity.

The proposed research is primarily library-based and will accommodate qualitative research methods. Inductive, analytical, and interpretive approaches will complement each other in the collection and analysis of data. The study will utilize and collect relevant data on *Sūrah al-Kahf* from classical and contemporary collections of *tafāsīr* including, but not limited to, al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, al-'Sadī, and al-Shinqīṭī. A comparative analysis of these works uncovering the depths of this *sūrah* will help in extracting related guiding principles for the development of the Islamic identity.

Literature Review

This study proposes to deal with two complementary themes: the notion of the Islamic identity and guiding principles for its development. As a result, the literature reviewed also reflects these two constructs. First, the very concept of the Islamic identity must be explored and understood and only then can guiding principles for its development be established.

In his article, “Islamic Identity in the Canadian Multicultural Context,” Abdullah Omar (2012) explores the concept of Islamic Identity within the Canadian multicultural context. He begins with a discussion of the concept of multiculturalism and its relation to the development of the Islamic Identity. The article then presents core elements of the Islamic identity which include the testimony of faith, a shared belonging to a global community, and a shared lexicon of expressions using the Arabic language. It concludes by outlining some of the external pressures such as Islamophobia and racism, faced by young Muslims in developing and preserving these identities. This article is extremely valuable to the proposed study. It gives insight into the notion of the Islamic identity in a Canadian context. The definition of the term identity itself has been discussed and detailed as characteristics that make an individual or group unique. Major challenges facing Muslim youth in building and preserving these identities exemplify the salient contribution of his study. There has however not been any discussion or insight regarding the process of developing and sustaining these identities.

This process has been subsequently presented in a study carried out by the Yaqeen Institute (2020) titled, “The Development of Religious Identity in Young People.” The concern about the religious identity of young Muslims in the West is specifically addressed. Its approach is inherently unique as it discusses not these identities themselves, but rather the process through which they are formed. Identity is first discussed as an abstract term and meaning is then given to it in a methodological process. Behaviours, environment, and cultural contexts are all discussed in providing critical background for the formation of these identities. Most of the focus remains on the concept of socialization and its contribution to

identity development. This includes parents, peers, and institutional and cultural socialization, all of which undoubtedly play a vital role in the construction of identity. It is concluded that the greatest factor contributing to this development is socialization, more specifically, parents. This study provides highly relevant research based on Western academic theories including both Muslim and non-Muslim sources. While this may seem like a limitation it may be what heightens its relevance within a Western framework. This is critical when dealing with the identity formation of Muslim youth. The study however limits its discussion to the formulation of the identity. The natural progression of providing guiding principles for the development of this identity awaits.

In his book, *Islam in the West: Beyond Integration*, Zijad Delic (2018) delves into the issue of Muslim identity. Integration and assimilation are key principles in understanding and developing the Islamic identity. While dealing with the notion of Canada as a generally inclusive society, the author reiterates that many new minority groups follow a classical pattern of either isolation or assimilation. He then presents a third alternative, constructive integration. This is a fundamentally Canadian concept of social and cultural integration allowing minority groups to fully engage with their society. The act of an encompassing assimilation is perhaps one of the key factors contributing to specific ethnic, cultural and religious groups losing part of what they came with. Once again Delic's book deals with a specific part of identity formation concerning integration and assimilation. He does not touch upon how these identities can be preserved and developed specifically by Muslim youth.

Another Master's thesis, "Al-Qawā'id al-Tarbawiyah kamā Tuzhīruhā al-Qiṣṣat al-Qur'āniyyah fī Sūrat al-Kahf" (The Pedagogical Principles as portrayed in the Quranic Stories of Sūrah al-Kahf) by Ahmad Yūsuf (2011) explores the intricacies of the sūrah. The author introduces *al-Kahf* and explores its background. He then extracts principles from the stories of the sūrah that can guide the development and education of a Muslim. He provides a detailed discussion of one of the most important guiding principles for Muslim youth, righteous companionship. He relays the importance of the selection of companions or friends entailing the

characteristic of good sound faith. He also discusses the rights and manners of how a friend should be treated. Dialogue and conversation, along with its etiquette are also discussed. These are vital principles that directly affect the Islamic identity of Muslim youth, especially in the Western context. The etiquette of the teacher and student is also analysed from the story of Mūsā and Khidr (peace be upon them). From the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn the principle of leadership is defined. Finally, the practical applications of these principles are presented. These principles and their applications are undoubtedly great tools which must be further elaborated in the context of the young Muslims. The research is limited however to issues of education and does not discuss identity at all.

Another study of the intricate stories of *Sūrah al-Kahf* has been presented in a master's thesis by Nadzrah Ahmad (2003) titled, "Al-Shakṣiyyah al-Insāniyyah kamā Tuṣawwiruhā Sūrat al-Kahf" (The Human Personality as portrayed by Sūrah al-Kahf). This study extracts the salient characteristics of the human personality perceived in the stories and characters in *Sūrah al-Kahf*. It is an intricate presentation of the relationship between this vital sūrah and the development of the personality or values of a person. The author analyses the contrasting types of personalities through the study of the stories and characters. A great deal of detail is presented on the sūrah itself and its four main stories. The background and exploration of the depth of the sūrah is critical in understanding its core values and extracting principles as she has done. The methodology follows through in not just presenting conclusions on the human personality and its development, but also the practical application of the findings. The research is somewhat limited to the stories as this is where characters are portrayed, and the human personality can be observed. There is no discussion explicitly on the concept of the Islamic identity or any subsets or groups of populations such as youth. This study is valuable as a similar approach or methodology could be taken in the proposed study while focusing on the unique and underdeveloped concept of identity and Muslim youth.

Finally, a related master's thesis titled, "Cultivation of the Muslim personality in light of Sūrah al-Kahf" (2019) identifies the elements of the ideal Muslim personality as outlined in *Sūrah al-Kahf*. The author explores

personality traits such as faith, knowledge, and leadership as portrayed in the four stories of *Sūrah al-Kahf*. The research presented is immensely valuable as some of these traits could be used in the development of the Islamic identity, however, it is extremely broad. Its limitation in relation to the proposed study is a strength of its own in that it seeks to establish the ideal Muslim personality. This is distinct from the principles this study seeks to extract, specifically for Muslim youth to develop their Islamic identity. Issues such as assimilation, integration, and social pressures are not discussed. It is then a highly relevant study to build upon having great value on its merit.

This research gap of how Muslim youth can maintain their Islamic identity is worth filling, to say the least. There is an abundance of research on *Sūrah al-Kahf* due to its thematic and narrative importance. Educational, intellectual, and socio-personal values have all been discussed in the light of the *sūrah*. Research on identity values and construction has been extremely limited at best. The literature on this *sūrah* mostly includes topical research relating to specific themes or motifs. The previous research can be used to build on and successfully present guiding principles for the development of the Islamic identity.

A summary of the specific research surrounding this great chapter of the Qur'ān shows that a specified study to benefit youth, specifically Muslim minority youth, has not been undertaken. This is a surprise based just on the thematic nature of the *sūrah*. It remains a gap that must be earnestly researched potentially cultivating immense benefits for Muslim youth in the society in which they live.

Defining Guiding Principles

In the context of this research, a clear and substantiated definition of the term “guiding principles” is vital. This is because it is from the aims of the research, if not the primary aim, to derive guiding principles for the development of the Islamic identity. When comparing definitions, the fundamental usage of the word “principle” can be divided into three main categories consisting of ethical rules, scientific laws, and the origin or

source of something (McDonald, 2009, p.99). The third definition is not intended in the context of this research. The first and second categories are distinctly related and will be subsequently explored.

The first definition comes under the category of an accepted universal law. This category accentuates the meaning of principles as being universal truths or laws that are known to be accepted, and this definition, although not exclusively independent of this study, is further from its intended use. The meaning of the term in this category is generally applied in the context of science, machinery, and practical laws (McDonald, 2009, p.100). The basic law of gravity is an established principle in this regard so it can be referred to as the principle of gravity (McDonald, 2009, 100). There is little room to deviate from these definitions into subjective realms. Science, machinery, and the laws of nature are usually deemed to be objective and neutral, like the example of gravity being universal (McDonald, 2009, p.100). There is, however, a potential for the definition of principles, in the context of this study to enter this first category and this will be discussed shortly.

The second category defines the term principle as moral or ethical rules (McDonald, 2009, p.101). Under this category, principles directly change and regulate behaviour (McDonald, 2009, p.101). This definition can be taken as the primary category in understanding this term. Principles can be summarized as codes or rules of moral and personal conduct that may guide individuals to develop and preserve their religious identities. Theoretically, rules and codes could be derived from *Sūrah al-Kahf* through the narratives as they are accounts of personal experiences filled with morally enriching lessons. These can be presented to Muslim youth as they may be able to apply them to overcome challenges they may face in preserving their Islamic identity.

Returning to the first category there is a deeper and interrelated understanding of the term principles. Hugh McDonald (2009) expands on this as he describes principles as having the ability to regulate change, internally as a method of operation, or externally, as a cause (p.99). This definition extends to the two categories, as both universal laws that lead to cause and effect, and as ethical rules in moral principles that we follow. In

this way, principles can be both scientific and ethical, universal, and personal, but what binds both realms is the establishment of cause and effect. Principles can cause or regulate changes in various ways depending on their classification as physical or metaphysical entities. Similarly, principles derived from *Sūrah al-Kahf* could in some ways be deemed to be universal simply because the text of the Qur'ān is meant to be universal (Ibn Qayyim, 1996, Vol. 4, p.375). It applies not to a specific group, tribe or race of people nor should it be limited to a specific geographical region (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, 1996, Vol. 4, p.375). It is true that its followers, or those that accept it to be a divine revelation, are limited perhaps by geography and culture, but in theory, it is meant to be a text that can be applied universally (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, 1996, Vol. 4, p.375). In this way, it could be argued that principles derived from the Qur'ān are as universal as scientific laws but vary in their acceptance. The goal is not to force a definition of principles into the first category, rather it is to illuminate the depth of the term and demonstrate the importance of principles, specifically if derived from the Qur'ān. The comprehensive term, guiding principles, can be finally defined as, rules or conducts of behaviour that can assist Muslim youth in developing their Islamic identity as minorities.

To truly benefit Muslim youth, these principles should not be arbitrary. They should directly address and present solutions to the challenges that the youth face in maintaining their religious identities. They must be specific and relevant principles that could practically be applied. Thus, the principles set forth will address each of the threats discussed including assimilation, peer pressure, immoral desires, religious doubts, the loss of religion, and Islamophobia. It is in this way that guiding principles from *Sūrah al-Kahf* could provide Muslim youth with applicable solutions and tools in dealing with the threats they face to maintain and preserve their Islamic identity.

Guiding Principles from The Narrative of The Companions of The Cave

The first narrative in *Sūrah al-Kahf* is that of the companions of the cave and it begins with a question posed to incite reflection on the miracles, wisdom, and ability of Allāh (SWT) as he says:

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا﴾

Or have you thought that the companions of the cave and the inscription were, among Our signs, a wonder? (Al-Qur'ān, 18:9).

The narrative begins with a group of youth fleeing and taking refuge in a cave where they assemble to supplicate Allāh (SWT). This is followed by a brief narrative in which Allāh (SWT) causes them to sleep in the cave for over three hundred years and blesses them with guidance and protection. These verses are followed by a flashback in which they recall that the reason for their fleeing is the pressure they faced to leave their religion and worship deities other than Allāh (SWT). One of the youth advises taking refuge in a cave because if they refuse to worship the deities of their people they would be killed or forced to leave their true monotheistic faith. Allāh (SWT) preserves them in a cave for what is known to be 309 years after which they awaken. One of the youths returns to the city with currency to obtain provisions but once the people of the town see his now ancient currency, they soon discover his miraculous secret. He returns to the cave where he is followed and shortly after all of the youth die in the cave. The people of that city, now over 300 years later, debate over them and venerate their status. The narrative ends with a discussion of the exact number of youth in this group and Allāh (SWT) concludes that only He knows the exact number and confirms that accompanying them was a dog, guarding the entrance of the cave. Finally, the narrative concludes with a reminder that Allāh (SWT) is the sole Protector, having complete knowledge of the unseen and unheard, and He alone makes decisions and legislation as He wills.

They stood firm in this test and proclaimed the truth, refusing to assimilate and succumb to the immense pressure of their society. As a result, Allāh (Glorified and Exalted) increased them in steadfastness and guidance and soon after being threatened by the King, they fled to a cave for protection.

﴿وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبُّنَا رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَن نَّدْعُوا مِن دُونِهِ إِلَهًا لَّقَدْ قُلْنَا إِذَا شَطَطًا﴾

And We bound [i.e., made firm] their hearts when they stood up and said, "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Never will we invoke besides Him any deity. We would have certainly spoken, then, an excessive transgression." (Al-Qur'ān, 18:14)

The First Guiding Principle: Firm Belief and Identity

In the narrative of the companions of the cave, the threats and pressures faced by these youth are identified through details of their society. It appears they were minorities in their beliefs and religious values, living in a hostile environment. They had to confront a powerful and threatening authority directly and were forced to remain steadfast and refuse to assimilate completely into their society. Just as the youth of the cave were pressured to assimilate, facing pressure not just from their peers but also the governing authority, Muslim youth today face pressure and threats, albeit much less direct. They are not being forced or threatened to leave their faith entirely, rather their pressure is less extreme. Regardless, a similar threat of assimilation and loss of identity remains salient in both the companions of the cave and Muslim youth today. Therefore, how the youth of the cave were able to resist, and the source of this resistance, is where guiding principles may lie in dealing with this threat of assimilation and peer pressure.

The first guiding principle: A Muslim should have pride in their Islamic Identity without fear of proclaiming their faith in the heart, verbally, or through action, especially in the face of opposition or threats.

This principle is a starting point for Muslim youth in dealing with the threat of assimilation and peer pressure. Muslim youth should not be ashamed of their identities, religious rituals, beliefs, or moral values. If there is a sense of shame then when pressured to conform to opposing ideas or values, it might be harder to hold on to the Islamic identity. A Muslim should not refrain from establishing the obligations that Allāh (SWT) has commanded, or from standing up against falsehood or speaking the truth, from fear of harassment, punishment, or embarrassment. If this proclamation is made in times of opposition and difficulty, there is no doubt Allāh (SWT) will protect and guide the ones who are steadfast as epitomized by the youth of the cave. This principle serves as a basis but does not reflect upon or give guidance as to how this pride and unwavering faith may be achieved. Consequently, the remaining guiding principles will serve that purpose as they all in some way reflect practical measures to develop this steadfastness. It is sufficient to say here that a firm belief in the heart along with verbal confirmation can result in an individual being blessed with patience and steadfastness in their faith at times of crisis, as portrayed in the narrative of the companions of the cave. This is supported by the following verse as Allāh (SWT) says:

﴿إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ ءَامَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى﴾

Indeed, they were youths who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in Guidance. (Al-Qur'ān, 18:13).

Due to their initial belief in Allāh (SWT) as the only Creator and the only one that deserves to be worshipped, along with their proclamation of this belief, they were increased in strength and guidance in the form of beneficial knowledge and righteous actions. (Al- Sa'dī, 2013, 18:13).

The Second Guiding Principle: Sincere *Du 'ā* (Supplication)

The next guiding principle is taken from the subsequent chronological event in the narrative. As the youth flee the oppressive King, they take refuge in a cave within a mountain and upon entering make the *du 'ā* (supplication):

﴿إِذْ أَوْىءَ الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا﴾

[Mention] when the youths retreated to the cave and said, “Our Lord, grant us from Yourself mercy and prepare for us from our affair right guidance.” (Al-Qur’ān, 18:10)

After putting forward their best effort in standing up for the truth, remaining steadfast in their religion and devotion to Allāh (SWT), they sought physical protection in a cave and called upon Allāh (SWT). Their request was answered, relieving them of their tribulation and granting them ease and protection. From this, the second principle is derived:

The second guiding principle: Sincere *du 'ā* (supplication) to Allāh is the key to overcoming any trial or tribulation.

The method in which their supplication was answered further shows the support of Allāh (SWT) as it was miraculous. Allāh (SWT) encompassed them with a deep sleep in which they were unconscious for 309 years as He preserved their hearts and bodies. Al-Sa‘dī (2013) further explores this connection between effort, supplication, and the help and assistance of Allāh (SWT) as he comments that had Allāh (SWT) willed, he would have protected these youth in other ways without revealing details. He caused them to turn their bodies left and right to avoid the earth swallowing them and their bodies decaying. Furthermore, they were protected from humans encroaching upon them in the cave as their dog that accompanied them was also overtaken by a slumber and stretched out in front of the cave almost as

though he was guarding it. Lastly, their eyes were open while they slept and if anyone was to look at them from outside the cave, they would flee in fear. This is how Allāh (SWT) protected their hearts, faith, and bodies from natural and human harm.

The Third Guiding Principle: Holding Firm to The Qur’ān

It is important to examine how exactly these youth were able to reach such a level of faith and action when faced with immense pressure. Although the official narrative ends here, there is a connection to be made with the succeeding verses that immediately follow, each in the form of a recommendation or command given by Allāh (SWT). Each verse gives us a new principle that follows the conclusion of their story, thereby illuminating how they were able to preserve their faith amid such a great test and serving as advice for those to come after. In the first verse Allāh (SWT) commands for his verses to be recited and followed as he says:

﴿وَأَتْلُ مَا أُوْحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كِتَابِ رَبِّكَ ۚ لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مُنْتَحِدًا﴾

And recite, [O Muḥammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. There is no changer of His words, and never will you find in other than Him a refuge. (Al-Qur’ān, 18:27)

Although the specific context of this verse relates to the circumstances of the Prophet (PBUH), as it is a direct command given to him, it may still be linked back to the narrative of the companions of the cave. The command given here is for the book of Allāh (SWT), divine revelation, to be recited and followed (Al-Shinqīṭī, 2015, 18:27). If we look back to the companions of the cave, we see in their opening verse the mention of “*al-Raqīm*,” which the scholars have discussed in detail. A common, if not majority opinion, shared by several notable *mufasssirūn* is that *al-Raqīm* was a book that they possessed (Al-Shinqīṭī, 2015, 18:9). This is similar to another verse

containing a derivative of the word “*raqīm*” meaning an inscription or writing:

﴿كِتَابٌ مَّرْقُومٌ﴾

It is [their destination] recorded in] a register inscribed. (Al-Qur’ān, 83:20)

Some further explained it was a book in which their beliefs and laws of their religion were written (Al-Qurṭubī, 2016, 18:9). They used to recite and follow this book which allowed them to increase and strengthen their faith. This is like the Qur’ān revealed to Muslims today and a similar relationship of reciting and following must be achieved to increase one's faith and remain steadfast. Therefore, from this, the third principle is derived:

The third guiding principle: A Muslim must hold firm to the Qur’ān by reciting it and following its teachings to increase faith and reliance upon Allāh.

Ibn Qayyim (2013) explains the effect and importance of consistently reciting the Qur’ān along with pondering over its meanings as he concludes that it is the basis for reforming the heart. The essential aspect though is a reading or recitation accompanied by a deep understanding of the words of Allāh (SWT) and a subsequent reflection (Ibn Qayyim, 2007, Vol. 1, p.187). He resolves that reading and contemplating a single verse is more beneficial to the heart than reciting the entire Qur’ān without understanding or contemplation upon its meaning (Ibn Qayyim, 2007, Vol. 1, p.187). The Muslim youth must focus on this miraculous book and take an approach not just to memorize the verses but to understand, deeply contemplate, and eventually apply the teachings of the Qur’ān. This is one of the most powerful methods and tools in connecting the heart to the divine words of Allāh (SWT) while increasing beneficial knowledge and righteous actions, consequently resulting in a strong sense of Islamic identity and steadfastness in the face of trials of tribulations (Ibn Qayyim, 2007, Vol. 1, p.187).

The Fourth Guiding Principle: Righteous Companionship

The recommendation and emphasis on reciting and understanding the Qur'ān is followed by a focus on companionship and support. The very next verse contains another command related to this as Allāh (SWT) says:

﴿وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا تُطِعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَن ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرْطًا﴾

And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His face [i.e., acceptance]. And let not your eyes pass beyond them, desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect. (Al-Qur'ān, 18:28)

Once again although this advice is specific to the Prophet (PBUH) and addressed to him, it can apply to all Muslims and be linked back to the youth of the cave (Yūsuf, 2011, 51). The hearts of these youth were united by Allāh (SWT) as they formed a friendship based firstly on *īmān* (faith) (Yūsuf, 2011, 51). When they are first introduced, the initial description of them given is that they believed in Allāh (SWT) together and were united in faith. They spoke the truth together and were a means of support when facing persecution. They fled to the cave together leaving their houses, wealth, and families. They resided in the cave together and were all recipients of a miraculous sleep from Allāh (SWT) that overcame and preserved them for 309 years. When they awoke, they helped each other as one of them journeys to the nearby town to buy food and drink for the rest. Finally, when their miraculous story was known to the people, they were all back in the cave and shortly after died together (Yūsuf, 2011, 51). This is a remarkable story of companionship and a salient feature throughout their narrative.

This theme extends further when discussing the dog that accompanied the youth. Ibn Kathīr uses the example of their dog and explains that even though he was an animal he was mentioned and honoured with these young men as the same miracle that overtook them overtook him as this is the result of good companionship (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, 18:18). Allāh (SWT) chose to mention the dog with them as he gave them company and protection and thus was included in their story. From this, the fourth principle is derived:

The fourth guiding principle: Righteous companionship based on faith and piety is vital in achieving steadfastness and preserving the Islamic identity.

This principle is affirmed by several prophetic narrations reflecting the importance of good companionship and the risk of having evil friends or companions. In an authentic *ḥadīth*, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

A person is likely to follow the faith of his friend, so look whom you befriend. (Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Ḥadīth no. 2378)

In another *ḥadīth*, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

The example of a good companion and a bad companion is like that of the seller of musk, and the one who blows the blacksmith's bellows. So as for the seller of musk then either he will grant you some, or you buy some from him, or at least you enjoy a pleasant smell from him. As for the one who blows the blacksmith's bellows then either he will burn your clothes or you will get an offensive smell from him. (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim. Ḥadīth no. 2628)

These narrations confirm the influence that friends or companions have on an individual. Due to this, a Muslim is advised to maintain companionship and close friendship with righteous and pious individuals

who aid them in good and prevent them from evil. This is a critical aspect of dealing with the threat of peer pressure as it could influence young Muslims either negatively or positively.

This influence however works in both ways as the potential for positive peer pressure can be essential to the maintenance of an Islamic identity. The benefits of this positive peer pressure come through keeping ties with righteous peers with similar moral and religious values. The parallels of good companionship in the narrative of the youth of the cave and Muslim youth today are similar. Muslim youth should choose companions based first on religious adherence and good moral character (Yūsuf, 2011, p.52). The benefits of this are numerous and many of them can be identified from the example of the companions of the cave. Good companionship leads to steadfastness and a strong Islamic identity. If the youth in the narrative did not have support and help from each other they might have been unable to successfully deal with the immense pressures they faced. They are always referred to by Allāh (SWT) in the plural form throughout their narrative, confirming that their strength was in their unity (Yūsuf, 2011, p.52). It was also this characteristic of being together for the sake of worshipping Allāh (SWT) that led them to attain the mercy, guidance, and companionship of Allāh (SWT) in the darkness of the cave (Yūsuf, 2011, p.52). Righteous friends and companions could aid Muslim youth in dealing with negative threats to their Islamic identity, while at the same time strengthening and developing these identities through positive social networks.

Muslim youth today can establish similar steps in preserving their identities when faced with the threats of assimilation and peer pressure. They should develop a strong relationship with the Qur'ān by frequently reading, understanding, and following its teachings. They should seek out good companions and base their friendship on sincerity and faith, choosing righteous individuals who will encourage them to uphold their religious practices and moral values. This will allow them to have pride in their Islamic identity and stand up and speak out against threats and oppression they might face. Finally, they should maintain a connection with Allāh (SWT) through sincere supplication and *du'ā*, especially during times of

tribulation, asking him for his mercy and guidance. If these principles are applied sincerely, there is no doubt Allāh (SWT) will aid and protect their religious identities just as he did with the companions of the cave. It is through these principles that Allāh (SWT) transformed a cave, a place of darkness and constriction, into a place of light and tranquillity for these youth. Similarly, for the Muslim youth, there can be a symbolic cave encompassed with the guidance and mercy of Allāh (SWT), protecting them from every trial and tribulation that they face.

Guiding Principles from The Narrative of The Companion of The Two Gardens

The second narrative presented in *Sūrah al-Kahf* is that of the companion of the two gardens. The parable of two men is given, one of which was given two gardens, or orchards of grapevines surrounded by date palms, between them an abundance of crops so each garden would gather the best of its produce (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:32). Each garden yielded its fruits without any decrease every year and between them were rivers that served as a water source to perfect the perpetual beauty and benefit of his gardens (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:32). Along with this the man was blessed with fruits of all types or other types of wealth like gold and silver (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, 18:34). With all these blessings, he converses with his companion, who was a righteous Muslim, and brimming with pride and arrogance he demeans him by boasting “I am greater in wealth, children, and honour or support than you” (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:32.) He then entered one of his gardens, while oppressing himself by disbelieving in Allāh (SWT) and refusing to acknowledge the blessing of Allāh (SWT). He then denies that the hour will ever occur, referring to the day of judgement, and claims that even if it is to happen and he was returned to his Lord, he would find better than this as a reward for his nobility and worldly status (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:32.) His believing companion tries to admonish him, questioning his disbelief in his Lord who created him from dust and then fashioned him into a sperm drop, then into a man. As a final reminder, he tells his companion if he had only said when he entered his garden, “Whatever Allāh wills and

there is no might except with Allāh,” it would have benefited him more (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:39). He states that although you see me as less than you in wealth and progeny it may be that Allāh will give me, from the blessings in the hereafter, better than your gardens (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:40). It also may be that Allāh will send upon your gardens a calamity from the heavens in the form of punishment such as intense rain, and it will become barren and sunken so that you will be unable to derive any more water and it will be devoid of any good. Thus, its fruits were encompassed, everything was destroyed, and its water sunk into the earth (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:42). The once proud and arrogant man was in a state of instant regret clapping his hands or striking himself with his palms, regretful of all that he had spent on his gardens wishing that he had not associated any partners with his Lord. There was nobody who was able to help him in his despair, nor was he able to aid himself, as indeed authority and protection belong completely to Allāh and he is the best in rewarding and giving the best outcomes (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:43).

The Fifth Guiding Principle: Avoiding Materialistic Desires

In this narrative, the companion of the two gardens was blinded by his love for wealth and status which led him to deny the attribution of blessings to Allāh (SWT). It is often materialistic deception that plays a role in the corruption of faith, morality, and submission to Allāh (SWT). From this, the fifth principle is derived:

The fifth guiding principle: An attachment to the materialistic desires of this world leads to a weakness in the conviction of the hereafter and the Islamic identity.

One of the major threats facing Muslim youth in the preservation of their religious identities is that of materialistic and immoral desires (Al-‘Uthaymīn, 2012, p.34). Examples discussed specifically include gender mixing, dating, and pornography. Ibn Qayyim describes this as the trial of desires (Ibn Qayyim, 2012, p.239). Indulging in the pleasures of this world

leads to the corruption of the heart, and the loss of religious identity (Ibn Qayyim, 2012, p.239). Muslim youth must not be attached to the desires and lusts of this world such as wealth, status, illicit relationships, and pornography. This is not to say that some pleasures cannot be enjoyed legally and healthily. Muslims should be able to accumulate wealth according to their needs, fulfil their desires with righteous spouses, and enjoy the blessings Allāh (SWT) has provided them, but the heart mustn't be attached to these entirely. Allāh (SWT) describes the life of this world as:

﴿وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَلَدَارُ الْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ ۗ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

And the worldly life is not but amusement and diversion; but the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah, so will you not reason? (Al-Qur'ān, 6:32)

Ibn Qayyim discusses this and gives the prescription for not being deceived by the material desires of this world. He explains that one will not be able to detach from the materialistic world except by pondering two realities; the first is the reality of this world and its deception, temporary nature, imperfections, and lack of any true value (Ibn Qayyim, 2002, p.112). The second is to ponder the reality of the hereafter and its everlasting state, its reality, and the superior nature of the pleasures and rewards bestowed therein (Ibn Qayyim, 2002, p.112). This is reflected in the Qur'ān as Allāh (SWT) says,

﴿بَلْ تُؤْتِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا﴾ (وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ)

But you prefer the worldly life, while the Hereafter is better and more enduring
(Al-Qur'ān, 87:16-17)

It is through this realization that Muslims can be patient and abstain from fulfilling illicit desires and attaching themselves to the hereafter

instead of the temporary materialistic world. It is through this that they can build a foundation to deal with the threat of these desires and preserve and develop their Islamic identity.

Guiding Principles from The Narrative of Mūsa And Khiḍr

Al-Qurṭubī (1995) comments on Mūsa's (PBUH) journey as he requests to follow and learn from Khiḍr (PBUH), but he is told that he will be unable to bear and have patience. Mūsa (PBUH) insists that he will be patient and not disobey him and so Khiḍr (PBUH) agrees on the condition that he does not question or challenge any of his actions until he, at the appropriate time, explains them. First, they board a ship which belongs to poor and destitute people and Khiḍr (PBUH) strikes a hole in it, thereby damaging it. Mūsa (PBUH) forgets his promise and questions Khiḍr (PBUH) but is soon reminded of the condition and Mūsa (PBUH) asks him to overlook his forgetfulness. Next, they meet a group of young boys, and Khiḍr (PBUH) kills one of them. This is a greater action than the first and although Mūsa (PBUH) remembers his promise he cannot bear the seeming injustice, so he questions al-Khiḍr (PBUH) as to why he killed an innocent boy. Khiḍr (PBUH) reminds him of the condition and Mūsa (PBUH) pleads that if he is to break his promise once more then they may part ways. Finally, they enter a town in which the people, although obligated, refuse to take them as guests and help them in any way. Khiḍr (PBUH), on his way out, sees a wall that is nearly destroyed and so he builds it again with his own hands. Mūsa (PBUH) questions him as to why he did these people a favour by constructing for them a wall without taking any compensation when they refused to assist them in any way. Khiḍr (PBUH) then announces this is the parting between them and explains to him each of the acts he committed. (Al-Qurṭubī, 1995, 18:66-78)

The conclusion of the narrative is summarized by al-Qurṭubī (1995) as he comments on the explanation of the actions of Khiḍr (PBUH). As for the ship he damaged it was revealed that following the destitute owners was an oppressive King that would unjustly seize any sound ship, so he damaged their ship to save them from a greater evil. As for the boy who he killed, it

was revealed that when he matures, he would become a disbeliever committing evil actions and that he would lead his parents to follow him, thereby cutting off his entire progeny from faith and righteousness, compromising their hereafter. As a result, through the command and revelation of Allāh (SWT) he was ordered to be killed and later replaced by righteous children. Finally, the wall that he rebuilt belonged to two orphans whose parents were righteous and under it was their inheritance. Khidr (PBUH) rebuilt the wall to protect their wealth until they reached maturity thus being able to extract their inheritance and have command over it. Khidr (PBUH) ends with reminding Mūsa (PBUH) that this was all done not from his own will but through the command of Allāh (SWT). In each case, the action resulted in the people being better off even though it may not seem as such from the outside (Al-Qurṭubī, 1995, 18:79-82.).

The Sixth Guiding Principle: Reliable Islamic Knowledge

From this narrative the immediate value of knowledge and the effect that it has on a person's faith, actions, and judgement is evident. Al-Qurṭubī reflects on the importance of seeking knowledge as this is the way of all righteous Muslims and scholars (Al-Qurṭubī, 1995, 18:60). The virtue of seeking knowledge from the scholars is immense even if it means travelling great distances and making sacrifices. Al-Bukhārī related that Jābir bin Abdullāh (RA) travelled a distance of one month to Abdullāh bin 'Unāys (RA) seeking knowledge of a single ḥadīth of the Prophet, (PBUH) (Al-Qurṭubī, 1995, 18:60). Therefore, the following principle can be extracted as the sixth:

The sixth guiding principle: Seeking authentic Islamic knowledge from reliable sources removes religious doubt and leads to certainty and a strong Islamic identity.

Religious doubt and the loss of religion in society are both major threats faced by Muslim youth in preserving their Islamic identity. The cause of religious doubt is either through wrong information, an incorrect

understanding, ignorance or misinterpretation and misconception (Ibn Qayyim, 2012, p.240). Many youths are at a crossroads and although they affirm the truth of Islam they are still uncertain (Al-'Uthaymīn, 2011, p.34). This is a result of them being exposed to many negative influences in their society like corrupt behaviour, skepticism about the truthfulness of the Muslim creed, ideological attacks and misrepresentation of Islam, and Islamophobia (Al-'Uthaymīn, 2011, p.34). They are confused and troubled and sometimes favour their Islamic creed and sometimes prefer the frivolous trends in their societies. Even though they may have an Islamic background and culture, they have been exposed to sciences and knowledge that seem to contradict their religion (Al-'Uthaymīn, 2011, p.34). Thus they stand between two cultures never obtaining certainty. This is reflected in the peril of many Muslim youth today looking back at the major threats of peer pressure, doubt, loss of religion, assimilation, and Islamophobia (Zine, 2011, p.401).

Therefore, the solution to these threats is not just gathering information but seeking and possessing sound authentic Islamic knowledge from reliable sources and people of knowledge, and then understanding and applying that knowledge (Zine, 2011, p.401). The cure for religious doubts is certainty and that is achieved through a sound intellect and an increase in beneficial knowledge (Zine, 2011, p.401). In this way, Muslim youth can free themselves of this confusion and doubt and find certainty in developing a strong Islamic identity. This must be done specifically by focusing on Islamic education from the primary sources of the Qur'ān and Sunnah with the help of sincere scholars (Zine, 2011). If they take this path then it will not be difficult for them to safeguard their identities and protect their faith leading them to certainty and success in this life and the hereafter.

Guiding Principles from The Narrative of Dhū Al-Qarnayn

The narrative of Dhū al-Qarnayn is the final one in *Sūrah al-Kahf*. It is also the final response to the Jews and disbelievers of Mecca revealed by Allāh (SWT) in this *sūrah* as he says to the Prophet (PBUH):

﴿وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ ذِي الْقَرْنَيْنِ قُلْ سَأَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا﴾

And they ask you, [O Muḥammad], about Dhu al-Qarnayn. Say, “I will recite to you about him a report.” (Al-Qur’ān, 18:83)

Ibn Kathīr (1995) comments on the journey of Dhū al-Qarnayn providing many details. He explains that Allāh (SWT) provided him with everything a king possessed and made for him a means to reach his goals through power, tools, and knowledge. He was given the ease to travel from the East to the West. He first travelled West where he found disbelieving people and was given the choice to punish them or treat them with mercy. Demonstrating his wisdom, he concluded that those who continue to oppress and disbelieve will be punished in this life and the hereafter. At the same time, those who believe and follow it up with good actions will be treated with leniency and given a reward in this life and the hereafter. Then he followed a course to the East, and he found people with no covering or protection from the sun. This was because the environment or land on which they lived could not support any buildings, so they were unable to build any shelter. When the sun would rise, they would enter underground or the sea and then when it would set they would exit and look for resources and food (Ibn Kathīr, 1995, 18:84-91).

Al-Sa‘dī (2013) continues to expand upon his journey stating that he then travelled a course until he reached from the South to the North. There he reached a land between two mountains and found people with a strange language and speech, but Allāh gave him the power to understand and converse with them. They pleaded to him that the tribes of Gog and Magog were causing corruption on the earth by killing and plundering, and they asked him to make a barrier between them in exchange for compensation. He replied that his reward from Allāh is greater, and he is in no need of their wealth. Instead, he requested from them manpower and tools so that he could place for them a protective barrier or dam for their safety. He called for sheets of iron to be brought and little by little filled the gap between the two mountains. Then he ordered for flames to be blown

into the structures of iron and then molten copper poured over the structure. Gog and Magog were trapped under that barrier, unable to climb the barrier nor were they able to penetrate it. He acknowledged that this barrier and support is a mercy from his Lord until the promise of Allāh will come on the day that it will be destroyed. Gog and Magog will finally escape, causing corruption on the earth once more (Al-Sa‘dī, 2013, 18:93-97).

The Seventh Guiding Principle: Emulating A Role Model

The example of Dhū al-Qarnayn and his journey exemplifies a great leader with wisdom, knowledge, courage, mercy, and selflessness. He was able to communicate successfully with people who had a strange background and language and assisted them in protecting them without taking any compensation. Muslim youth today need positive role models and leaders possessing similar qualities displayed by Dhū al-Qarnayn. They need to observe and internalize examples of leaders with the qualities of knowledge, wisdom, selflessness, courage and ultimately, success.

Following these role models will allow them to further strengthen and develop their Islamic identity, giving them practical guidance in dealing with any threats and excelling in their faith. In the search for role models, however, it can be tempting to begin with those who have achieved material success around us. Successful and practising celebrities, sports figures, teachers, religious and political figures or even parents are often looked at as positive and suitable role models. However, often overlooked is the one true model that was sent as an example not just for Muslim youth but for all Muslims and mankind: the final Prophet and Messenger; Muḥammad (PBUH).

This is confirmed by the Qur’ān as Allāh (SWT) says:

﴿لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ
اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا﴾

There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern (An example to be followed) for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often. (Al-Qur'ān, 33:21)

Ibn Kathīr states that this verse reflects the major principle of following the Prophet (PBUH) in his sayings, actions, and how he dealt with all situations until the day of judgement (Ibn Kathīr, 1995, 33:21). Al-Qurṭubī (1995) defines the term “*uswah*,” used to describe the Prophet, (PBUH), as a role model to be followed in all situations (33:21). Therefore, this leads to the seventh and final guiding principle:

The seventh guiding principle: Muslim youth should have positive role models to emulate and the best example is that of the Prophet (PBUH).

Role models have been thought to provide youth with two main functions (Al-Qurṭubī, 1995, 33:21). The first is an example of a physical process. That is, they are examples of a process being taken to achieve a certain result or goal (Al-Qurṭubī, 1995, 33:21). Secondly, they serve as a confirmation that certain identities are possible in a society, especially as minorities (Al-Qurṭubī, 1995, 33:21). They provide for the youth two distinct roles of inspiration and advice. If the youth can relate to the situations and circumstances of the role model, then the effect of their influence could be significantly greater.

The recommendation can be made that Muslim youth, like all other Muslims, should prioritize the Prophet (PBUH) as their primary role model. This does not mean that it is exclusive and other individuals cannot be of positive influence, especially in contexts of counselling and advice. Rather, it should be a clear starting point with all others referring or leading back to this example. Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah explains that the Messenger (PBUH) is the greatest criterion amongst mankind in terms of his manners and guidance (Al-Baghdādī, 1996, p. 8). The exact nature of the Prophet (PBUH), being the essential and perfect role model has been beautifully explained by Ibn Qayyim (1996) as he reflects that the *ummah* of

Muḥammad (PBUH) does not need anyone after him, rather they are only in need of someone to convey what he came with (Vol. 4, p.375). His message was comprehensive, and universal, and is still preserved and this is not limited to any time or palace (Ibn Qayyim, 1996, Vol. 4, p.375). He has taught and been an example for comprehensive situations and actions from being a Muslim minority to being the leader of a vast and expansive nation (Ibn Qayyim, 1996, Vol. 4, p.375). The Prophet (PBUH) came with examples of every detail in life from worship to eating, drinking, intimate issues, and travelling, and has acquainted us with all needs, information and advice, to all means of good and evil with clear and established proofs (Ibn Qayyim, 1996, Vol. 4, p.375).

Conclusion

The challenges faced by Muslim youth in preserving and developing their Islamic identity are profoundly complex. To overcome these challenges, they have the best guidance in the Qur'ān. It is a clear and illuminating book as described in the opening verse of *Sūrah al-Kahf*:

﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ عِوَجًا﴾

[All] praise is [due] to Allah, who has sent down upon His Servant [Muḥammad (ﷺ)] the Book and has not made therein any deviance [From the truth or the straight path]. (Al-Qur'ān, 18:1)

This study has derived guiding principles from *Sūrah al-Kahf* presenting a framework for the development and preservation of the Islamic identity. The seven guiding principles derived from the four narratives of *Sūrah al-Kahf* are distinct in their themes and applications. There is a profound connection between them all reflecting the single most important theme of the *sūrah*, protection. All seven principles demonstrate in some way how to gain protection from trials and tribulations. A firm belief and identity, sincere supplication to Allāh (SWT), a strong connection with the

Qur'ān, and good companionship, all protect a Muslim from social pressures in society. Internalizing the true nature of this world in comparison to the hereafter protects a Muslim from the trials of materialism and corrupt desires. Seeking authentic Islamic knowledge from reliable sources protects a Muslim from ignorance, misguidance, and religious doubts. Finally, closely following the final Messenger (PBUH) as a guide and role model protects Muslims from external corruption, serving as a barrier between them and any potential threats. These seven guiding principles all lead to receiving the protection of Allāh (SWT). They are practically applicable steps that are necessary for Muslims to achieve this divine protection.

This theme of protection is observed in each of the four narratives. Each narrative contains examples of individuals receiving or not receiving protection from Allāh (SWT) (Bajwa, 2012). In the first narrative, the companions of the cave were protected in the cave for over 300 years. In the second narrative, a man's luscious and fruitful gardens were not protected and ultimately destroyed. In the third narrative the theme of protection extended to every sub-narrative of Mūsa's journey with Khidr (PBUT). The poor people had their boat protected from the oppressive King when it was damaged. The parents and progeny of the boy who was going to lead them all astray were protected when the boy was killed. The wealth of the two orphans was protected from the people of the town with the construction of the wall. Finally, in the last narrative, people seeking security from the corruption of Gog and Magog were granted protection in the form of a physical barrier.

A final epiphany reveals the realization that protection, and all the means to achieve it, comes solely from Allāh (SWT), as He is the ultimate Protector. This is reflected in the introduction of each of the four narratives in the *sūrah*:

In the narrative of the companions of the cave Allāh (SWT) relates:

﴿نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ ءَامَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَرَدَّنْهُمْ هَدًى﴾

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It is *We* who relate to you, [O Muḥammad], their story in truth. Indeed, they were youths who believed in their Lord, and *We* increased them in guidance. (Al-Qur’ān, 18:13)

In the second narrative of the man with the two gardens Allāh (SWT) states:

﴿ وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا رَجُلَيْنِ جَعَلْنَا لِأَحَدِهِمَا جَنَّتَيْنِ مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ وَحَفَفْنَاهُمَا بِنَخْلٍ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمَا زُرْعًا ﴾

And present to them an example of two men: *We* granted to one of them two gardens of grapevines, and *We* bordered them with palm trees and placed between them [fields of] crops. (Al-Qur’ān, 18:32).

In third narrative of Mūsa and Khidr Allāh (SWT) explains:

﴿ فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ءَاتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ﴾

And they found a servant from among Our servants [i.e., al-Khidr] to whom *We* had given mercy from Us and had taught him from Us a [certain] knowledge. (Al-Qur’ān, 18:65)

In the final narrative of Dhu al-Qarnayn, Allāh (SWT) establishes:

﴿ إِنَّا مَكَّنَّا لَهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَءَاتَيْنَاهُ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ سَبَبًا ﴾

Indeed, *We* established him upon the earth, and *We* gave him from everything a way [i.e., means]. (Al-Qur’ān, 18:84)

In this way, the conclusion of *Sūrah al-Kahf* is profound in reminding us of what is at stake. Success in this world is limited and the true abode of the Muslim is the hereafter. If Muslim youth follow these seven principles it will result in not just an affirmation of their religious identity, but eternal success. A strong Islamic identity established through

these seven principles affirms a relationship with Allāh (SWT), leading to the supreme objective of a Muslim, a successful meeting with Allāh (SWT). This is precisely how the *sūrah* culminates, with a poignant reminder of this very meeting as Allāh (SWT) concludes:

﴿فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا﴾

So, whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord - let him do righteous work and not associate in the worship of his Lord anyone. (Al-Qur’ān, 18:110).

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The authors declare no financial or personal conflicts of interest related to the writing of this article.

Authors’ Contributions

Shahbaz Gaya designed the study, gathered the literature, and wrote the article. Dr. Nadzrah contributed to the article and provided feedback and guidance in the design, research, and presentation of this study.

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