

Chapter 3

Khiḍr in Sufism

Bernard McGinn, who wrote extensively on aspects of Christian mysticism, acknowledged that to define mysticism is a problematic task. Mysticism is often regarded as a controversial dimension of religious practice and thus may be seen through the lens of a variety of categories or frameworks rather than any single master narrative. McGinn notes three general ways of viewing mysticism. Firstly, as part of religion; secondly, as a way of life; and, thirdly, as a process of communicating the inner experience of the presence of the divine.¹ The subject of this chapter may be located primarily in Islamic mystical thought, or more appropriately in Sufi writings. Inasmuch as Khiḍr lies within the realm of Sufism, it would be apt to say that he has been received in all the three different ways within the Islamicate tradition.

As already noted, the figure of Khiḍr is connected to the quranic text, the *tafsīr* literature, the *hadīth*, the *qīṣaṣ al-‘anbiyā’*, a vast body of Sufi literature, as well as various folk traditions, many of which remain fluid and ever changing. The Khiḍr phenomenon and its associated traditions have taken up such a huge space within the Islamicate traditions and cultures that it is impossible to do justice to this topic in a single work. In this chapter, I will primarily focus on the religious and mystical understandings of Khiḍr’s role and how they may be connected with the symbolism of “light” and spiritual or inward “illumination” which many Sufis claim to have received through him.² Nowhere is there more emphasis on seeking knowledge of and from God than in the mystical dimension of faith—the esoteric understanding of Islam. In Sufism, the seeker strives to be a *mu‘min*; to not only seek knowledge but to implement it in one’s life as part of one’s spiritual practice. The secret of such knowledge, it is said, does not lie in isolation from or renunciation of the world. Rather it is found by being in the world and in seeking it from all available avenues. Al-Ṭabarī, citing an early Muslim scholar Ibn Abbās, states that after the Israelites were saved “from the people of Pharaoh” one of them asked Moses: “is there on earth anyone who knows more than you . . . ?” To which Moses said, “‘No.’ So God sent Gabriel . . . who said . . .

‘Indeed, there is a man on the shore of the sea who knows more than you.’”³ In effect, Moses is reminded here that “knowing” requires more than what we know and that we should never stop learning.

Sufis are among those who seek such wisdom and divine knowledge. The first “recorded appearance of the term *ṣūfī* dates from the middle of the second century” of Islam (8th century CE) when it was apparently “applied in Kūfa to the famous Jābir ibn Ḥayyān.”⁴ Sufis aspire to be “near” God; many were recognized in their own time as “friends of God” or saints. It is believed that the concept of *wilāyah* (sainthood) was first introduced into the technical vocabulary of Sufism by Hakīm al-Tirmidhī who lived in the 8th and 9th centuries. However, *taṣawwuf* (mystical practices and traditions of piety) existed prior to that time. The term *wilāyah* (or *walāyah*) would be familiar to the readers of the Qur’ān where it appears twice (8:72 and 18:44).⁵ In early Islam mystics and pious individuals were not called Sufis; the term became known later. Referring to Muslim piety traditions, Chodkiewicz notes, “the thing existed before the word” *taṣawwuf* came along. Similarly, in later periods the word *taṣawwuf* did not always mean that the practice was authentic. Imām Hujwīrī, lamenting the decline of spiritual practice in his time (11th century), reportedly said, “*taṣawwuf* is today a name without reality, whereas it was once a reality without a name . . . the pretense is known and the practice unknown.”⁶ The Sufi path, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, is an “inward journey” where one’s goal is to know the self and the source from where we came as well as our final destination, which does not sound as controversial a description as it has been made to be in some conservative Muslim circles. Nasr’s statement is based on the quranic affirmation: “to God we belong, to God we shall return” (*innā lillāh-i-wa innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn*). It is said that change is inevitable and everything around us is going through transformation which entails, at least for those who believe, that there is “life” after the physical earthly life. Sufi’s want this belief to be the front and center of their journey here on earth as it offers a perspective and enables them to make choices based on that reality. This conscious way of living becomes the “path” for many. Nasr contends that the Sufi path, “leads from the desert of outwardness, forgetfulness, selfishness, and falsehood to the Garden of Truth, wherein alone we can realize our true identity and come to know who we are.”⁷ For Sufis, this self-knowledge is instrumental in moving from ordinary consciousness to higher states of consciousness where an individual can attain a deeper perspective on reality.

KHIDR AS AN INITIATIC PRINCIPLE

As mentioned previously, Khidr is said to have drunk from the “water of life.” For this reason, he is described as the one who has found the source of life, “the Eternal Youth.”⁸ He thus becomes the mysterious guide and an immortal saint in the popular religious piety. For the Sufis, Khidr is seen as one of the spiritual poles (*aqṭāb*, plural of *qutb*) of the inhabited universe. In that, Khidr’s status as a *qutb* also corresponds to the notion of the “hidden Imām” in Shī‘ī piety where the figure of the Imām functions as an invisible yet active guide to the living community of believers.⁹ Annemarie Schimmel describes the role: “Sometimes the mystics would meet him on their journeys; he would inspire them, answer their questions, rescue them from danger, and, in special cases, invest them with the *khirqā[h]*, which was accepted as valid in the tradition of Sufi initiation.”¹⁰ Khidr is the initiator of those who seek the esoteric realities and those who strive on the path to someday becoming worthy of being a “Friend of God.” The state of such a friendship (*wilāyah*) requires a long journey on an arduous path; arduous because of the struggle between ego on one side and the longing for the divine on the other. This initiatory function of Khidr is characteristic of his being a *qutb* (or spiritual pole) and hence timeless. Moreover, Khidr’s affiliation with his initiates is also timeless and “transhistorical” in the sense that it is part of the “tradition whose line is vertical . . . and whose moments are independent of the causality of continuous physical time” which Ibn ‘Arabī has called the ‘*tajdīd al-khalq*’ or the recurrence of the creative act.¹¹ Khidr is the hidden initiator of those who walk the mystical path like those from the Uwaysī *ṭarīqah*. Seekers in this particular Sufi order do not receive their initiation by a living master, instead they begin their mystical journey either by following the guiding light of the teachings from earlier masters or by being “initiated by the mysterious prophet-saint Khidr.”¹² Here Khidr becomes an immortal personification of the ‘initiatric principle’ as he performs the role of a master/teacher in the invisible hierarchy of saints (*awliyā*). He is indispensable to those who accept his discipleship, and he is always “present” for the disciple, without being physically there. The idea of one’s teacher being present despite his/her physical absence is part of a wider spiritual matrix than just for the followers of Khidr. Sufis have long taught that for “the disciple the *shaykh* is always mysteriously present, especially during the rituals. The *shaykh* never dies . . . even if he has physically left this world. His spiritual guidance (*irshād*) and assistance continue even after death.”¹³ The figure of Khidr often invites the seeker to journey beyond the limitations of reason, into imaginal worlds. At times, the apparent contradictions symbolized by Khidr can be helpful just as paradoxes can make one see the range of possibilities instead of just the polar extremes.

Khiḍr represents mercy (*rahmah*) a recognized attribute of prophecy, yet he is also known by his servitude (*‘ubūdiyyah*) to the truth and to all the creatures of God.¹⁴ In this, Khiḍr can be said to represent the servant-leader ideal so much emphasized in contemporary spiritual discourse.

The important role of a spiritual teacher becomes evident as one realizes the limitations involved in monitoring and guiding one's own journey toward God-realization. But not all Sufis have a physically present teacher. Khiḍr gained enormous reputation and popularity in the Sufi tradition due to his role as an initiator and a spiritual guide who is not physically there with the student. He nevertheless guides in his absence; this is what he is known for. Several Sufi orders began with claims (made by someone who would likely become known as the founder of the group) of being initiated by Khiḍr. It is yet another way of initiation through "a source other than a human master." A great many Sufis have said to have received *khirqah* from Khiḍr and that includes Ibn ‘Arabī, one of the more well-known Muslim figures in the West.¹⁵ By the early Middle Ages, Sufism had blossomed into a major force among the competing expressions of faith. In this milieu, Khiḍr had come to symbolize "the third path" to the knowledge of God, purely and constantly supernatural, giving access to the divine mystery (*ghayb*) itself.¹⁶ He is invoked by almost every Sufi and mentioned by scholars of the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth*. In the writings of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, Khiḍr rules over "men of the hidden world" (*rijāl al-ghayb*)—who are the exalted saints and angels.¹⁷ Khiḍr is counted among those who, in the classical Sufism, are called the *abdāl*, ("those who take turns") a designation within the ranks of the *awliyā’* of Islam.¹⁸ In a divinely instituted hierarchy of such saints, Khiḍr holds the rank of their "spiritual head." They are called *abdāl* because they apparently become a "substitute" for Khiḍr and take turns in "helping in his mission of assisting and saving good men in danger and distress."¹⁹ The initiatory function of Khiḍr is characteristic of his being a *qutb* in the hierarchy of saints. For Ibn ‘Arabī, Khiḍr is one of the four *awtād* (pillars who hold the spiritual world in its place, as it were):²⁰ Idrīs (Enoch) is the *qutb* in that hierarchy; then are the two imams, Jesus and Elijah and the fourth is Khiḍr—a pillar (*watad*) of knowledge and truth.²¹ Through these four pillars God protects the "purity" of religion. Each of them has been assigned a distinct function: the first protects the faith (*īmān*), the second and the third protect sainthood (*wilāyah*) and prophethood (*nubūwwah*), and the fourth protects the mission (*risālah*). It is also held that of the four "living" prophets, "two of them, Idrīs and Jesus, dwell in the celestial spheres, and the other two, Elijah [Ilyās] and Khaḍir, dwell on this earth unseen by most mortals."²² Thus the *awtād* hold the spiritual world just as, in the words of the Qur’ān, the mountains hold the earth like "pegs."²³

Louis Massignon (d. 1962), the famous Catholic scholar of Islam, had much to say about Khidr. He understood Khidr as archetypal initiator of those who seek a spiritual path. Khidr initiated Moses by way of a series of tests (referring to the three episodes in the quranic narrative which were at first offensive to Moses), which were guided by the vision that “exceeds the literality of Good according to the Law.”²⁴ Massignon saw himself as one of those whom Khidr had initiated to the path; he was said to be “in spiritual consonance with the *khadiriyyah* inspiration” having been visited upon by “the gentle breeze of the solitary initiator-al-Khidr.”²⁵ This claim is not insignificant if it is indeed made to explain Massignon’s quiet diplomacy during Vatican II on behalf of Islam and its recognition by the Council as part of the Abrahamic family of religions alongside Judaism and Christianity. For his efforts to be inclusive of Muslims as believers in God, Massignon was seen by some of his fellow Catholics to be dangerously stepping at the outer boundaries of his faith, even though he remained firmly established in his home tradition despite his love for Sufism. It is perhaps in this sense that Khidr provided Massignon the “vertical presence” allowing him to operate above the “law” as it were without violating any of it in essence.²⁶ For Massignon, Khidr may be hidden from most of us at present, but he will appear again to assist the Mahdi and Jesus at the end of times, so to speak.²⁷ In character with his mystical vision, Massignon suggests a role for Khidr in the eschaton. Indeed, Khidr is busy repairing the “cracks” in the “traditional edifice” in order to keep it intact and instrumental. Khidr’s return at the end of times will serve as evidence of his freedom “from the limitations of time and space,” and of his leadership as, in Laude’s words, “the prophet of verticality.”²⁸ Khidr will then guide the faithful to Jerusalem “to join Jesus son of Mary.”²⁹

In the Qur’ān, Khidr is called a “servant” of God. Such a designation implies a high status and at the same time a sense of loyalty to divine law. In Islam, the goal of existence is said to be to cultivate deep appreciation for and servanthood towards God. The Sufi path helps one do that firstly by breaking the ego which prevents individuals from reaching the state of humility necessary for servanthood (*‘ubūdiyyah*). For Laude, in a mystical sense, besides servanthood, Khidr also represents the “freedom in God, which is . . . the other side of servanthood. Servitude towards God at each and every instant is actually the pathway to a spontaneous and potentially infinite freedom.”³⁰ Laude explains this as Massignon’s attempt to present Khidr (and Ilyās) as someone whose servitude (*‘ubūdiyyah*) transcends law and who is thus transformed into a universal mystical trope. However, there is a slippery slope here due to the largely subjective nature of assessment involved which is used to determine a person having reached the status of a “true servant.” Indeed, many have claimed to reach “true servanthood” by way of achieving the “freedom in God” which supposedly releases them from the obligations of the

“law” or practices which are binding on Muslim believers. For traditionalists like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *‘ubūdiyyah* is related to the quranic term for worship (*‘ibādah*) as in: “We [God] created human beings and jinn so they would worship [God]” (Q. 51:56). Thus, from an Islamic perspective the primary purpose of human existence is to “worship God” which can be interpreted to mean learning how to attain a “perfect state of servanthood.”³¹ A person’s entire life is a journey of discovering one’s true self and one’s purpose by trying to cultivate humility through practicing the rituals of faith (*arkān*) such as daily prayers, and other actions like fasting, pilgrimage, and almsgiving at appropriate times during the year. For Sufis, there are additional spiritual practices that vary from school to school, and are aimed at striving (*jihād*, “to strive”) for servanthood. This striving symbolizes a sacred journey, towards the realization of “what it means to be fully human.” Once our ego realizes its full servanthood or *‘ubūdiyyah*, it also becomes clear that “as servants we can never become the Lord.”³²

This prudent analysis of the path is crucial because some Sufi schools of thought and practice have focused intensely on the goal of “becoming one” with Reality, or al-Ḥaqq, the Truth, which is one of the quranic names for God. Muslim sages have left ample warnings for those who heed their message that it is important to distinguish between the path and the goal. The desire and striving for “union” with God may be a noble goal but its attainment is a different matter and much harder to quantify. Sincere practice is indeed fundamental to reaching the experience; however, excessive piety and obsessively pursuing one’s “desire for union with God itself distances [the seeker] more than anything else from God.”³³

Historically as well as in contemporary times there have arisen numerous pseudo-mystical movements which claim to represent higher spiritual realities. Such movements, and those individuals who identify with them, have done great harm to the reputation of *taṣawwuf*, as they deviated from the *sharī‘ah* claiming to be “one with God” having achieved mystical knowledge and experience. They see themselves as treading the mystical path at the expense of the observance of the *sharī‘ah*. Many such individuals have laid claims regarding their encounter with Khidr who supposedly gave them such knowledge and the authority to what amounts to innovation in matters of faith (*bid‘a*). Theologically speaking, it is not sustainable to reconcile Sufism with a practice that intentionally excludes *sharī‘ah*. Sages from earlier periods when Sufi thought and practice was still nascent warned of these dangers and sought to distinguish between the *mutaṣawwif* (true seeker) and the *muṣṭawif* (pretender to mystical knowledge); between a “true Muhammadan” and the “shopkeeper sheikh.”³⁴ Similarly, the famous Sufi and scholar, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), in his *Kīmīyā-e sa‘ādat*, defends the Sufi way from allegations by Orthodox Muslims and

argues that Prophet Muḥammad's piety and Sufi disciplines have much in common. At the same time, he insists that for the Sufi path to be authentic it cannot claim to be above the necessity of observing the ritual requirements outlined in the *sharī'ah* including the *arkān* (the Five Pillars).³⁵ Most practitioners of Sufism who contemplate the prophecy of Khidr and consider him their "hidden" *shaykh*, as it were, do not disregard the *sharī'ah*; instead they begin their journey within it.³⁶ For those who seek an encounter with Khidr, it is said there are certain conditions that need to be met. Firstly, the person should be a follower of the *sunnah* (prophetic example); secondly, the person should have no greed left for this world; thirdly, the seeker should be kind and gentle towards everyone.³⁷ Therefore, the *sharī'ah* is a pre-requisite and essential for one to be initiated in the *ṭarīqah* or the "path" because the path emanates from and exists within the *sharī'ah*.

If the esoteric reality of Islam (*ḥaqīqah*) is likened to the center of a circle, the exoteric form of it (*sharī'ah*) is the circumference of that circle. And the radius proceeding from the circumference to the center is the mystical path (*ṭarīqah*) leading a pilgrim, as it were, from *sharī'ah* to the *ḥaqīqah*; "from outward observance to inner conviction, from belief to vision, from potency to act,"³⁸ and most of all from the human realm to the divine realm. If the circumference represents the wholeness of reality, the center symbolizes its uniqueness and oneness (*tawḥīd*). This description is also helpful in demonstrating the relationship between esoteric and exoteric aspects of faith; each is differently constructed and yet both are centered on Reality. It may also be used to frame the Khidr-Moses relationship as mutually dependent. Each is given only part of the domain where they may exercise their authority; each of them needs the other to see the wholeness of truth. Sufis in general regard the *sharī'ah* as integral to the path, however, there are also groups and individuals who consider the spiritual path to be "above" the law, even if they continue to observe/practice the pillars of faith enshrined in the *sharī'ah* for other reasons. Similarly, piety is integral to the practice of Islam, yet many puritanical and orthodox-leaning Muslims frown upon practices that they consider "extra-Islamic." The Khidr-Moses story may indeed be instructive for both kinds of practitioners. Khidr does not operate independent of divine will and law, as he noted in his explanations for the three acts. Similarly, *sharī'ah*-centric, law-abiding Moses is amenable to be guided by a spiritual figure who appears to be "amoral" in the story.³⁹ The gap between the two positions seems wide and may only be bridged by taking a position of humility.

THE MASTER-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP

The “vertical dimension” of the spiritual relationship (between God and the seeker) depends entirely upon divine initiative even when human effort appears to be instrumental. As already discussed, Khidr’s actions in the quranic story were in their entirety directed by divine will, as part of the verse Q. 18:82 clarified towards the end of the encounter between Khidr and Moses (. . . I did not do [these things] of my own accord . . .). The role Khidr played was that of an agent. Spiritual knowledge is “illuminative and unitive, a knowledge whose highest object is the Truth.” This knowledge comes in three stages: *‘ilm al-yaqīn* (knowledge of certainty) *‘ayn al-yaqīn* (the eye of certainty), and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (the truth of certainty).⁴⁰ The Sufi knows by God or through God because, in the final analysis, human beings can hardly lay claim to acquiring knowledge through independent means. Just as we are spiritually dependent for our existence on the Source of all beings, similarly we are utterly reliant for our knowledge and actions. Nothing is originally from us, strictly speaking. A Sufi saying explains this dependence on God: “we exist in this world, but we subsist in another.” In other words, we may be physically “here” but our subsistence, our ability to breathe and be alive through that act of breathing, is determined elsewhere. Our food may be of this earth, but *why* (not just how) that food sustains us, that is determined on a different plane.

Sufism is a path that begins with repentance (*tawbah*) and leads one to a higher state of awareness. Through a series of steps and stages (*maqāmāt*, pl. of *maqām*) one may achieve such higher virtues that open oneself to the mysteries of the divine presence. This process is generally seen as unfolding in the “passing away” (*fanā*) in God and in “surviving” (*baqā*) as a transformed person. It is believed in mystical circles that to attain such a state of being one needs a trained instructor, someone who has already walked that path. Often the instructor is both physically and spiritually present and is in communication with the seeker even though only the spiritual dimension of such a relationship is essential. The Khidrīan trope offers a variant to this traditional master-disciple relationship. Khidr as the Sufi master and instructor is absent as a physical being and yet fully present in the lives of innumerable seekers of the divine light who find themselves dependent upon his guidance for their spiritual journey. How is it that Khidr, an otherworldly spiritual guide, can relate to a disciple who materially and organically exists in the time-space continuum? Henry Corbin suggests reimagining the disciple’s relationship with Khidr to be dissimilar to what someone would have with an earthly teacher. The thought that it is dissimilar opens the mind to seeing other possible modalities at work including dreams. Questioning the nature

of such a relationship is to question the historical existence of Khidr whereas Khidr, as many insist, is “transhistorical” and, by virtue of being “immortal,” also transcendent.⁴¹ Attempts to explain how Khidr can be in many places at once and be always present for his disciples is problematic to say the least.

If, taking the standpoint of analytical psychology, we speak of Khidr as an archetype, he will seem to lose his reality and become a figment of the imagination, if not of the intellect. And if we speak of him as a real person, we shall no longer be able to characterize the difference in structure between Khidr’s relationship with his disciple and the relationship that any other *shaikh* on this earth can have with his.⁴²

Hence the experience of being a disciple of Khidr “invests the disciple, as an individual, with a transcendent, ‘transhistorical’ dimension.”⁴³ It is an experience which cannot be explained using the space-time matrix of our existence and sense perception.⁴⁴

There are countless stories in mystical literature about experiences of meetings and forming relationship with Khidr. Often narrators acknowledge their dependency upon Khidr’s instruction and guidance. These stories have been passed down for generations as oral wisdom and are part of the ethos. The Central Asian religious group, the Uwaysī order, considers these stories as fundamental to the practice of the mystical path. This Sufi order is named after Uways al-Qaranī (d. 657) of Yemen, a contemporary of Prophet Muḥammad. Uways became a Muslim without ever meeting the Prophet in person.⁴⁵ However, he regarded Muḥammad as his physically absent but spiritually present teacher and shaykh. There emerged a model named after Uways for people with no visible human guide. It became acceptable to follow a teacher who may be geographically separated (or is invisible for some other reason) and yet may be “present” and “available” to the disciples. Uwaysis are known to regard Khidr as their guide and a hidden master. Indeed, some Sufis would argue that anyone who commits to the mystical path may receive instructions from Khidr from the world of the unseen (*‘ālam al-ghayb*). Like the Uwaysis, many individuals and groups rely on Khidr’s guidance or other “physically absent instructor[s].”⁴⁶ They believe it is possible to connect directly not just with Khidr, but also with other prophets and saints, thus the Khidrian model becomes a paradigm for the master-disciple relationships more generally. Accounts of Sufis’ communication and their spiritual relationship with hidden saints are recorded in the *History of the Uwaysīs* written in the early seventeenth century.⁴⁷ Besides that of the Uwaysīs, there are in the literary tradition numerous instances where Khidr is said to have played an important role as a guide and a helper. One prominent example within the literary *genre* in medieval times is the *Dāstān* or romance story of Amīr Ḥamzah, which originated

in the eleventh century.⁴⁸ Khidr appears in the *Dāstān* as a rescuer of the hero (Amīr) and his companion (‘Amar). He instantly saves the distressed from hunger and thirst, ferries people across bodies of water safely onto dry land, and counsels those struggling with making a righteous decision. In the *dāstān* all sorts of characters familiar to a Muslim reader (religious, historical, as well as fictional) are woven into the narrative of the stories. These no doubt add an element of believability to works of fiction. Like in other genres, Khidr always plays the familiar role of being a “savior” and does miraculous things, always by the leave of God, reciting the “Great Name” before performing extraordinary things. Here he is seen to empower those who are on the side of the good (like the hero, Amīr Ḥamzah) and helps destroy the ones (a villain of the story, Malunah Jadu) who seek to harm others.⁴⁹

The story of Khidr reminds us of the importance of the notion of discipleship even for those who may have already assumed the role of a teacher. It illustrates the need for knowledge at a time when it seems there is nothing more to be learned. The ethics or propriety (*adab*) that informs the master-disciple relationship is evident in an episode in the life of Ibn ‘Arabī. It is between him and his spiritual teacher Shaykh ‘Urayb, which also involves Ibn ‘Arabī’s first encounter with Khidr. Ibn ‘Arabī reports that once he disagreed with the Shaykh on a matter of secondary importance. Later when he left the Shaykh, Khidr appeared to him and told him, “Accept what the Shaykh says!” So Ibn ‘Arabī repented. But as the story goes Ibn ‘Arabī was right in the matter of disagreement, nevertheless, *adab* required him to be submissive to one who was superior in rank. This was the reason why Khidr “did not tell him he was mistaken but simply [that] he should submit to his master.” Addas continues: “although [Ibn ‘Arabī] repented of his attitude he would not budge from his position. As a disciple, *murīd*, Ibn ‘Arabi was hierarchically inferior to ‘Urayb and owed him his obedience; as a gnostic (‘*ārīf*) endowed with an inner certainty (*basīrah*), he spoke the truth and in this particular instance surpassed his master.”⁵⁰

The role of being a Sufi teacher demands rigor, openness to the divine, and the experience of a lifetime. Moses’ encounter with Khidr is an example of such rigor where strong faith is called upon to direct one’s actions that are seemingly illegal, abhorrent even. Servitude to God alone enables the person to earn the heart of being a master-teacher. It is through servitude alone that one may hope to attain that most subtle knowledge, *ma‘rifah*, which is sought by many but is given to a select few. When God destines one to attain such knowledge, God institutes a divine experience in favor of such a person and an encounter with Khidr is one such experience. The 14th-century Indian Sufi master, Sharafuddin Maneri (d. 1381), interpreted the Khidr-Moses encounter as a means for Moses to learn how to be like a Sufi master. In one of his

famous letters to a fellow Sufi companion Maneri describes the “qualifications” of a shaykh:

Khidr taught Moses the five stages of becoming a Sh[ay]kh. . . . The first is the submission of servanthood. . . . Second is an aptitude to receive truth directly from God without any intermediary; the third is a submission distinguishable from the first submission by a very special grace; the fourth is the honor of receiving divine knowledge of God without any intermediary; and the fifth is the riches of receiving infused knowledge.⁵¹

Sufis use language that is sometimes objectionable to the legal minded. For the orthodox scholars too, the spiritual claims or aspirations can appear grandiose and, for some of them, border on heresy. Maneri’s words echo the teachings of the mainstream Sufi schools in the Muslim world, but they become suspect because of the apparent attempt to bypass the channels of scholarly authority of traditional religious teachers (*‘ulamā*). Maneri was hardly the first to speak in this fashion. Scores of others, including the 8th-century Sufi teacher Rābi‘a of Basra, attempted to deconstruct the dichotomy that exists between hell and paradise, self and Self, male and female (and the separate rules that govern their affairs). In her masterful attempt to portray the grandeur of the eternal dwelling place of souls, beyond the world of petty legal disputes, for example, over how to correctly stand in prayer, Rābi‘a lays out the essence of what it means to love God.

In love, nothing exists between breast and Breast.
Speech is born out of longing, true description from the real taste.
The one who tastes, knows; the one explains, lies.⁵²

Rūmī too says something similar when he speaks of the futility of legal wranglings between the *‘ulamā* and between them and others, especially as it relates to the language of love vis-a-vis legalism.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll
meet you here.
When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to
talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other* doesn’t make
any sense.⁵³

Both Rābi‘a and Rūmī started out as disciples and in the course of their own spiritual journeys acquired (received, granted, learned) the skills and rigor necessary for the role of becoming teachers in their own right. They belonged to different epochs and places, schools of thought and each received

knowledge differently. Together they represent the highest and the exemplary among Sufi masters. Each left a legacy that inspired countless others. Each modeled the practice of spirituality differently which speaks to the diversity of forms and schools. Rābi‘a and Rūmī are but only two among the numerous Sufi masters that have enriched the mystical traditions in Islam. Some of them we know well and others not so much and yet the master-disciple tradition continues and with them the renewal of spiritual life. It has been argued that the Khidr-Moses story may be seen to inform the “practice of discipleship with a living master.”⁵⁴ As already seen in the previous chapter, this is problematic due to the widely accepted hierarchy of prophets where Moses is placed among the top five while Khidr’s status as a prophet is not even universally recognized. Thus, clearly, the Moses-Khidr story is not as straightforward as it may appear. What is clear from the story is the importance for any seeker to remain open to learning, even from Khidr and even when one is as highly stationed as Moses. Rūmī explains it as follows: “If so exalted a figure as Moses sought [Khidr], how much more should a lesser person submit to his tutelage.”⁵⁵

KHIDR AND LIGHT

Khidr is said to possess gnosis (*ma‘rifah*), a kind of divine insight. Khidr is the one on whom God had bestowed mercy and given knowledge from God (Q. 18:65). Khidr’s knowledge may also be seen as a conduit for receiving divine light (*al-Nūr*) which can be compared with gnosis. An unnamed mystic described it in the following words. “If gnosis were to take visible shape, all who looked thereon would die at the sight of its beauty and loveliness and goodness and grace, and every brightness would become dark beside the splendour thereof.”⁵⁶ This idea of distinguishing between worldly brightness and divine splendor makes it plain that there is a kind of illumination (*kashf* or unveiling) of the soul which happens as a result of divine knowledge. This notion of “inward illumination” is found in many religious traditions and Sufism is no exception.

Illumination of the mysteries of *‘ālam al-ghayb* has been sought by mystics from all walks of life and was promoted by individual Sufis as well as some schools of Sufi practice since the 9th century. One of the schools which deals with the theme of “light” and illumination, having to do with *ma‘rifah* or spiritual knowledge, is known as al-Ishrāqiyyah, the philosophy of illumination, which was founded by Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191).⁵⁷ According to Henry Corbin, Suhrawardī was seminal in bringing out the “oriental” dimension of Islamic wisdom—a dimension without which, by implication, the Western or Semitic aspects of Islam would remain incomplete. Suhrawardī,

among others, sought to maintain the unity of philosophy and mystical experience.⁵⁸ At the same time, according to Corbin, the extra-Islamic elements within the “theosophy of Light” (*ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*) are related to ancient Persian ideas that were prevalent prior to Islam. The “light-infused ontology”⁵⁹ of Suhrawardī seems to have influenced a number of major Muslim thinkers who in turn opened new frontiers for perceiving the notion of light in Islamic mystical discourse. The notion of divine knowledge as “light” and its symbolic meanings arose as a result of trying to interpret the so-called “Light verse” -Q. 24:35

(Sūrat al-Nūr)- that refers to a “lamp” which reflects divine light:

God is the Light of the heavens and earth. His Light is like this: there is a niche, and in it a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, a glass like a glittering star, fueled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, whose oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it—light upon light. God guides whoever He will to his Light; God draws such comparisons for people; God has full knowledge of everything.⁶⁰

Taking their cue from this allegorical narrative many Sufistic interpreters of the Qur’ān theorized about the symbolism of the lamp and its light. The expression “mystical lamp” became popular in Sufism and was understood as an “illuminating device” that gives the Sufi an enigmatic and extraordinary status compared with other human beings. The idea of a lamp lit with the “blazing fire” of divine love symbolizes higher station (*maqām*) held by individuals as a result of their knowledge and wisdom. The “lamp” is said to reside in the *qalb* (spiritual heart or intellect which the Sufis identify as the organ that lies at the core of one’s being) of a person, through which one connects with God. Al-Ghazālī’s famous treatise (*Mishkāt al-anwār*) speaks of the mystical lamp that “burns” in the heart and warms the soul of the seeker.⁶¹ The lamp here signifies the archetypes or most beautiful names of God (Q. 7:180).⁶² Numerous other references to the lamp can be found in the writings of Muslim mystics.⁶³ In his commentary on Sūrat al-Nūr, 24:35, Ibn ‘Arabī considers “niche” (*mishkāt*) as an outer cloak of the heart to protect from passions (*ahwā*). The glass within the niche represents the heart even as it is transparent allowing the light to shine through because it (the heart) has attained the level of purity and has been enabled to reflect divine radiance.⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī regards the “lights” (*anwār*, pl. of *nūr*) as the “Divine Sayings which appear in the ‘niche’ of the Prophet [Muḥammad], who manifests the glory and beauty of these lights exactly as they are in reality.”⁶⁵

The light motif is used in a variety of ways in the Islamic tradition. Many scholars and mystics have alluded to the notion of light as an allegory for mystical insight and as a precursor to religious experience. In addition to the

metaphor about the niche, Ibn ‘Arabī wrote of spiritual light as something which he personally experienced. He reported that in 1198 as he prayed in Azhar mosque, located in the city of Fez, he witnessed something quite extraordinary: “I saw a light that seemed to illuminate what was before me, despite the fact that I had lost all sense of front and back, it being as if I had no back at all. Indeed during this vision I had no sense of direction whatever, my sense of vision being, so to speak, spherical in its scope, I recognized my spatial position only as hypothesis, not as reality.”⁶⁶ By relating this experience Ibn ‘Arabī claimed to have reached what he calls “the Station of Light.”⁶⁷ In this vision of reality, the “normal coordinates of space and time are suspended and become mere hypothetical.”⁶⁸ What is at stake in experiences like these is the very idea of how we understand reality. Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that human beings exist at the crossroads of two kinds of reality: one that is not really a reality as such—this worldly reality; and the other, a reality that connects human beings, and them alone, to God. This dimension is part of the spiritual “inheritance” from God given to human beings who are God’s vicegerents (Q. 2:30). Whether human beings are able to visualize, actualize, and realize this inheritance within their lifetime or not is another matter; some clearly do as Sufis through the ages have claimed. Spiritual light is one of the keys to the realization of this inheritance. For Ibn ‘Arabī light is “synonymous with knowledge of God and knowledge of the Unity of Being.”⁶⁹ He often mentioned “those illuminated ones” referring to other Sufi masters and *awliyā’*. He believed that the *qalb* is the place where God dwells, and the seeker should “illumine it with the lamps of the celestial and divine virtues.”⁷⁰

Similarly, al-Ghazālī in his *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (*Revival of the religious sciences*) speaks of those whom the uncreated light illumines with its brilliance.⁷¹ He also has his own “highly developed light metaphysics” where he identifies illumination as the third degree of *tawhīd*.⁷² This light motif is often expressed in terms of “veils” and the separation through them between divine reality and the world of matter. Thus, we find a description within Sufi thought of the path from darkness to light which involves “seventy-thousand veils” and at least half of these are said to be the “veils of light.”⁷³ The goal of the seeker is to become “refined” by going through each of these veils until the seeker (*sālik*) has attained the freedom from the “taint of darkness.” The symbolism of light and freedom from darkness are synonymous and they imply a high degree of self-consciousness as in knowing “light as light” and freedom as the state of being free.⁷⁴ The unveiling of each of these invisible barriers is equivalent to illuminating the spiritual self to a degree which otherwise experienced darkness, where darkness equals ignorance. The connection between light (*nūr*) and gnosis (*ma’rifah*) has many other connotations, articulated by numerous Muslim thinkers and mystics. The light is also seen as the light of certainty (*al-yaqīn*). Without this light one remains in the state

of ambiguity insofar as one's faith is concerned. Thus, *nūr* within a believer's heart (*al-qalb*) allows him/her to "see" what is not visible to the naked eye. Hence a believer who is endowed with the "light" of certainty is said to have attained the *r'uyāt al-qalb* (visitation of the heart) and through which the believer is endowed with extraordinary powers of discernment (*firāsah*). Thus, notions such as inward illumination and spiritual light (*al-nūr*) can be said to represent divine knowledge and the wisdom that accompanies such knowledge.⁷⁵ Sufi accounts above point to the importance of the symbolism of light in mystical experience. Based on the foregoing, I propose that Khidr's knowledge may also be seen as a conduit for receiving divine light.

In his work on the symbolism of the role played by Khidr, Patrick Franke speaks of the idea of "sacralization of spaces in the traditional world of Islam"⁷⁶ as well as the notion of "encountering Khidr."⁷⁷ Franke's work deals with accounts of Khidr's appearances in specific places that allowed the stakeholders to declare those places as sacred. This sacralization of space coincides with accounts of seeing or even meeting with Khidr. This allowed the person to claim special spiritual status and a confirmation of and blessing on their mystical quest. If appearance of Khidr in a particular place is "sacralization of space" it may be argued that encountering Khidr is the "sacralization of being" or of experience. It is through an encounter with Khidr that many have come to be regarded as Sufis or aspiring to be one. Meeting with Khidr somehow became the norm in the Sufi experience.⁷⁸ There are countless reports by Sufis and scholars throughout Muslim history who thought Khidr to be "alive" and active; and stories of him appearing to people are given as evidence of such claims. Among the many personal accounts of meetings with Khidr, Ibn 'Arabī may have left one of the most intricate reports concerning his meeting the mysterious saint. Ibn 'Arabī writes that while he was on the port of Tunis, Khidr appeared to him as if coming from over the water but he was not wet, and then he proceeded towards a distant light house reaching it while taking only a few steps.⁷⁹ Franke's work showcases a collection of accounts by Sufis who claim to have met Khidr and have thus gained what are variously called mystical insights, secret knowledge, divine mysteries, and so on.⁸⁰ The knowledge and other gifts claimed by Sufis who have encountered Khidr shows two things simultaneously. First, it shows that Khidr's high spiritual status allowed the mystically inclined to gain a spiritual status for their own purposes, be they interested in pursuit of divine proximity or in asserting their right as inheritors of spiritual authority and attaining the role of a Sufi master. The first pursuit denotes a purely spiritual quest, and the second perhaps a more politically tainted quest for power and control of an institution or group. As Franke notes, Khidr was almost always "instrumentalized as a symbol of religious authorization."⁸¹ Second, by the very nature

of such accounts and their proliferation, Khidr gains universal appeal, and his veneration grows steadily. This explains the wide dissemination of the Khidr legend in predominantly Muslim societies. Franke attests to the fact that his collection of Sufi accounts of meeting with Khidr allowed him to map out the “general historical phenomenology of the veneration of this figure within the Islamic world.”⁸² Information about and claims regarding an encounter with Khidr did not always come through the Sufis themselves; many times, they are made on behalf of a Sufi teacher by their disciples and/or the masses who wish to believe in such stories of hope and renewal. Sometimes, the veneration of Khidr blends in with reverence for the Sufi master where the followers begin to identify their teacher as Khidr. Said Nursi cautions regarding this point in his *Mektubat*:

Saints who attain to direct vision and knowledge of reality have reported virtually unanimously their adventures with Khidr and these elucidate and provide this level of life. One of the degrees of sainthood . . . is even called the degree of Khidr. A saint who reaches it receives instruction from Khidr and meets with him. But it sometimes happens that such a person is mistakenly thought to be Khidr himself.⁸³

In Sufi poetry, Khidr sometimes takes on the role of the cup-bearer (*sāqi*) offering the possibility of an encounter with the divine.⁸⁴ Here cup is the symbol of mediation or guidance and, simultaneously, a reference to initiation to be on the path (*ṭarīqah*) that eventually leads to “immortality” and “friendship” with God. Here are a few examples of those who reported to have seen or have met Khidr. ‘Imad al-dīn ‘Alī Kirmānī (d. 1371) was a jurist, Sufi, and a poet known to have written in the genre of *ghazal* and the *mathnawī*, the latter being “a poem based on independent internally rhyming lines.”⁸⁵ In one of his later works of poetry written in 1364 called the *Ṣafā-nāma* (‘The Book of Purity’) also known as *Mu’nis al-abrār* (The Companion of the Pious), Kirmānī speaks of an encounter with Khidr that appears almost as a qualification announcement or a declaration of credentials of being a mystic.⁸⁶ Sharafuddīn Manerī, the noted Sufi who lived in India is said to have been visited by Khidr. The legend has it that he was recognized as having saintly qualities at birth and while still an infant, Khidr came to him and “rocked his cradle” as an indicator of Manerī’s (to be realized) spiritual achievements.⁸⁷ Sufi Hasan Khwājā’ (d. 1725) also reported a qualifying event where Khidr appears to have pointed to him as someone who has reached a high spiritual status.⁸⁸

Just as Khidr has been used to transform profane space into a sacred one (this is what Franke’s work tries to show) I argue that the Khidr symbol has also been used to transform individuals—according to Sufis, their

souls—journeying from the inner darkness of ignorance to attaining knowledge of and proximity with God and thus achieving the station of light. If we apply this analysis to the story of Khidr, two aspects of Khidr's presence seem to converge: a manifestation of God's mercy (*rahmah*) and a reflection of divine light (*al-nūr*). Khidr's knowledge is primarily esoteric (*'ilm al-bāṭin*) and thus his being a conduit to divine knowledge can be viewed as his being a dispenser of divine light simultaneously, since God in Islam is both the "source of all knowledge" (*Al-'Alīm; Al-Khabīr*) as well as "source of esoteric light" (*Al-Nūr*). Khidr makes divine knowledge manifest for Moses in the quranic episode and thus he brings him to "light," as it were, from being in the "dark" about the true nature of things.⁸⁹ It may be noted that Khidr's role as a prophet can be maintained within the classical understanding of quranic interpretation and other religious literature, while his role as a revealer of "divine light" is mainly developed and sustained within Sufism. Inasmuch as Khidr is seen as a repository of divine knowledge and the initiator of those who seek divine proximity, i.e., those who are on the path, Khidr functions as an "illuminator" of souls. For knowledge and light are allegories that may be considered two sides of the same coin. As guardian of the symbolic lamps that illuminate every corner of the *qalb* (heart) of the seeker, Khidr remains a servant of God like other human beings. He performs spiritual service for seekers on behalf of God and by the leave of God, as noted by Sufis of all ranks. Khidr's "miraculous" actions do not make him divine or semi-divine. His continued presence as reported by many may be a mystery, but he remains a mortal. No credible *ṭarīqah* or Sufi order will entertain the idea of collapsing the divine-human boundary whereby divinity may be attributed to a mortal. However, stories of boundaries being crossed do exist. In the next chapter I will focus on folkloristic aspects of the Khidr story where the boundaries between orthodox renderings of the divine command and its popular manifestations and associated practices are not as clearly defined and maintained as in some of the Sufi-leaning traditions.

NOTES

1. Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 1, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xv.

2. This is not to be equated with illumination of the mind alone but rather with a kind of spiritual realization that is more inclusive of one's totality of being. In religious discourse this occurs as a result of disciplined piety on the part of the seeker and a compassionate gaze (which a Christian mystic may recognize as dispensation of grace) on the part of God.

3. Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa’l mulūk)* vol. 3 *The Children of Israel*, trans. & annotated by William M. Brinner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 10.

4. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 27.

5. For *wilāyah* see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 47, and Renard, *Friends of God*, 260 and 264.

6. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 20. See also, ‘Alī ibn Uthmān al-Hujwiri. *The Kashf al-mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism by al-Hujwiri*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, Gibb Memorial Series, no. 17 (London: Luzac, 1959).

7. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 6–7.

8. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, 56.

9. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 58.

10. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 106. For *khirqah*, see Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, s. v. “Khirqah,” 225. It is described as “a rag”—a sign of worldly poverty. It is placed during an act of initiation of a disciple into the order by a Sufi master as cloak (also called “*muraqqa’ah*”) over the disciple or if not done physically using actual cloth, *khirqah* can be placed by communicating it through other means (such as a dream or a vision as in the case of Ibn ‘Arabī who is said to have received it from Khidr).

11. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, 90ff.

12. They are called *Uwaysīs* after the name of Uways al-Qarani, a contemporary of the Prophet who lived in Southern Arabia. See Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 22; Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, 32, 53–54.

13. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 59.

14. Patrick Laude, *Massignon intérieur* (Lausanne, Suisse: Editions L’Age d’Homme, 2001), 34.

15. Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 62. Addas reports that Ibn ‘Arabī was invested with the “*khirqah Khadiriyya*, the ‘initiatic mantle’ transmitting the *baraka* of Khadir firstly at Seville in 592 [A.H.] and then at Mosul in 601 [A.H.].” See also Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 105–6; and Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, 63–67.

16. Louis Massignon, *La Passion de Husayn Ibn Mansūr Hallāj* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 2:54.

17. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 82.

18. Not a quranic doctrine but found in the *ḥadīth*; the *abdāl* are first mentioned in Imam Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*; See Virginia Vacca, “Social and Political Aspects of Egyptian and Yamani Sufism,” *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 8, no. 4 (October 1960): 233–34.

19. Massignon quoted in Vacca, “Social and Political Aspects of Egyptian and Yamani Sufism,” note 1.

20. Although it is said above that Khidr is a *qutb*, that role differs from *watad* only in function; in rank they are equal to one other.
21. Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*, 2:3, cited in Ḥusaynī, *Ḥayāt al-Khidr*, 119.
22. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 93.
23. "Have We not made the earth as a wide expanse, and the mountains as pegs?" ("awtādan" = pillars), Qur'ān 78:6–7 as translated by Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*.
24. Louis Massignon, "Elie et son rôle transhistorique, *Khadiriya*, en Islam," in *Élie le prophète*, ed. Gustave Bardy, vol. 2, *Au Carmel dans le Judaïsme et l'Islam* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1956), 269–90, cited in Patrick Laude, *Louis Massignon: The Vow and the Oath* (London: Matheson Trust, 2011), 30.
25. Laude, *Louis Massignon: The Vow and the Oath*, xii.
26. *Ibid.*, 30.
27. Massignon, "Elie et son rôle transhistorique, *Khadiriya*, en Islam," 161, cited in Laude, *Louis Massignon: The Vow and the Oath*, 35.
28. Laude, *Louis Massignon: The Vow and the Oath*, 35.
29. Massignon, "Elie et son rôle transhistorique, *Khadiriya*, en Islam," 152.
30. Laude, *Louis Massignon: The Vow and the Oath*, 30.
31. Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 12.
32. *Ibid.*
33. A caution attributed to Sufī Abu'l Ḥasan al Shādhilī, cited in Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 12.
34. This categorization is from the famous Indian Urdu poet Khwāja Mīr Dard, quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 20–21.
35. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā-e sa'ādat* (Tehran: Markazi Publications, 1954).
36. Sufī accounts of struggle regarding faith often reflect their desire to seek Khidr's help. One such account is attributed to 'Abd al-Wahhāb bin Aḥmad al-Sha'ranī who invoked Khidr seeking help in how to maintain balance (*mīzān*) between esoteric practices and his fidelity to acts of faith which are part of *sharī'ah*. See al-Sha'ranī as cited in Elboudrari, "Entre le symbolique et l'historique Khadir immémorial," 25–26.
37. Ramaḍān Yūsuf, *Al-Khidr baynā al-wāqī'*, 344.
38. See William Stoddart, *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1985), 20.
39. Laude, *Massignon intérieur*, 34.
40. Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 30–31.
41. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, 54–55.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. It is said that the saints of God are accustomed to receiving wisdom and guidance in nonconventional ways; one of these is Khidr's frequent visitation "with . . . [them] by translevitation." Elmer H. Douglas, *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shādhilī*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 17 and note 9 on 248.
45. Vollers, "Chidher," 252–53.

46. Julian Baldick, *Imaginary Muslims: The Uwaisi Sufis of Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 3.

47. See Julian Baldick's translation and commentary on the *History of the Uwaisis* in his book *Imaginary Muslims*.

48. Annemarie Schimmel, *Classical Urdu Literature from the Beginning to Iqbāl* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 204. For the *Dāstān*'s origins in mediaeval Persia and later development in India, see Frances W. Pritchett, trans. and ed., *The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dāstān of Amīr Ḥamzah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

49. Pritchett, *The Romance Tradition in Urdu*, 168–69.

50. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 64.

51. Sharafuddīn Manerī, *The Hundred Letters*, trans. and ed. Paul Jackson (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 30.

52. Charles Upton, *Doorkeeper of the Heart: Versions of Rabi'a* (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1988), 36.

53. A passage from a poem by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, "A Great Wagon," in *Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks (New York: HarperOne, 2004), 36.

54. Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet*, 21.

55. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī cited in John Renard, *All the King's Falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 85.

56. An unnamed mystic quoted in Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Arkana-Penguin Books, 1989), 7.

57. J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, with a new foreword by John Voll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 140–41.

58. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, 20–21.

59. Ian Richard Netton, *Allāh Transcendant: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1989), 157.

60. Translation by Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 223.

61. Miguel Asín Palacios, *La espiritualidad de Algazel y su sentido christiano* (Madrid & Granada: Imprenta de Estanislao Maestre, 1934–41), 371.

62. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār: The Niche for Lights*, trans. W.H.T. Gairdner (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1924).

63. For example: "When God kindles that lamp in the heart of His servant, it burns fiercely in the crevices of his heart [and] he is lighted by it," in A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 50; and "while the inner lamp of jewels is still alight, hasten to trim its wick and provide it with oil," in Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 146.

64. Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*, 1:434.

65. Muḥyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Divine Sayings: 101 Ḥadīth Qudsī. The Mishkāt al-Anwār of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. Stephen Hirtenstein and Martin Notcutt (Oxford: Anqa, 2004), 12.

66. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, *Sufis of Andalusia: 'Rūḥ al-quds' and 'al-durrah al-fākhīrah' of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. R. W. J. Austin (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 30.

67. Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tiernan, eds., *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A Commemorative Volume* (Element, 1993), 55. Cf. Adam Dupre & Peter Young, "The Life

and Influence of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi” in *Union and Ibn ‘Arabi: Proceedings of the First Annual Symposium of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* (Durham: Durham University, April 1984), 1–10.

68. Peter Coates, *Ibn ‘Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously* (Oxford: Anqa, 2002), 164.

69. Ibid., 133.

70. Miguel Asín Palacios, *El-Islam cristianizado*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Plutarco, 1931), 423.

71. Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Delhi: Kitāb Bhawan, 1933).

72. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 96.

73. Attributed to W.H.T. Gairdner in Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 15–16.

74. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), 116.

75. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 51.

76. Patrick Franke, “Khidr in Istanbul: Observations on the Symbolic Construction of Sacred Spaces in Traditional Islam,” in *On Archeology of Sainthood and Local Spirituality in Islam: Past and Present Crossroads of Events and Ideas*, ed. Georg Stauth, Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam 5 (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2004), 45.

77. The title of the book by Patrick Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*.

78. The notion of meeting with Khidr is found even in non-Muslim westerners who came in contact with the Islamicate cultures. As already mentioned, Carl G. Jung, the well-known psychiatrist and author, wrote in his autobiography that he dreamt of Khidr several times and then goes on to elaborate on the symbolism of these dream images connecting them to other events in his life. Jung in fact made significant use of the figure of Khidr in his writings and identified him as one of the archetypes. See Carl Gustav Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, trans. R.F.F. Hull (London: Routledge, 2003). Jung also used the Khidr-Moses parable to teach his patients the need of learning through paradoxes. For Jung, the parable of Khidr-Moses opens with Moses’ desire to follow Khidr on his journey to seek wisdom from the latter. However, Moses is soon shocked to witness three acts by Khidr which apparently (exoterically speaking) contradict divine law and each time he questions Khidr about these. At the end, Khidr unveils the reasoning behind his acts and it becomes clear to Moses that there is more than what meets the (exoteric) eye, hence the paradox.

79. Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*, 1:86.

80. Franke notes that as part of his doctoral dissertation, which was on the subject of Khidr, he collected one hundred and fifty texts from various times and regions. Franke, “Khidr in Istanbul,” 45; Cf. *Begegnung mit Khidr*.

81. Franke, “Khidr in Istanbul,” 48.

82. Ibid., 45.

83. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, “First Letter,” *Letters* (Istanbul: Sözlük Publications, 2001), 23.

84. Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*, 287.

85. J. T. P. de Bruijn, et al., “Mathnawī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, et al., 2nd ed., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0709.

86. J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems* (Surrey UK: Curzon Press, 1997), 120.

87. Paul Jackson, S.J., *A Jesuit Among Sufis* (Gujarat: Sahitya Prakash, 2017), 117.

88. Alexandre Papas, "Soufisme, pouvoir et saintete en Asie Central: Le cas des Khwajas de Kashgarie (XVIe-XVIIIe siecles)," *Studia Islamica* 100/101 (2005): 178.

89. Moses' objections to Khidr's actions were precisely because he (Moses) was in the "dark" and did not have the knowledge of those things that lay behind each of Khidr's actions. Thus, Khidr had to explain the hidden meanings behind each act so Moses could understand. Both had knowledge; Moses was given the *sharī'ah* or the law (exoteric knowledge), while Khidr was endowed with *'ilm ladunnī* or the knowledge of the unseen world (esoteric knowledge). For a Sufi view of the categories of knowledge and prophetic mission, see Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, 68, 80–81.

Prophet al-Khidr

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