

Khidr

Khidr or **Al-Khidr** (Arabic: كرد, "the Green One", also transcribed *Khidr*, *Khidar*, *Khizr*, *Khizar* and (Persian: رضخ), Turkish: *Hızır*) is an enigmatic figure in Islam; some say he is a 'Abdan Ṣālih (righteous servant of God) while others say he is a prophet. Al-Khidr is best known for his appearance in the Qur'an in sura al-Kahf.^{[Qur'an 18:65 [1]]} Although not mentioned by name in the *āyah* (verse), al-Khidr is assumed to be the figure that Musa (Moses) accompanies and whose seemingly violent and destructive actions so disturb Moses that he violates his oath not to ask questions.

Islamic tradition sometimes describes al-Khidr as *Mu'allim al-anbiya* (Tutor of the Prophets), for the spiritual guidance he has shown every prophet who has appeared throughout history. The one prophet whom al-Khidr did not teach is Muhammad; significantly, it is Muhammad who taught al-Khidr. This is an unsurprising reversal of the master-disciple relationship exemplified by al-Khidr and Moses. Having the young, unlettered Muhammad teach the wise, ancient al-Khidr underscores the superiority of Muhammad's prophethood and the fact that he too is a repository of divine knowledge (*ilm ladunni*).

Hızır is also an important figure in Alevism as well as the subject of a major Turkish holiday, Hindrellez. In the Jordanian city of Mahis there is a Mausoleum to al-Khidr.

Quranic narrative

In ayat 18:65-82, Moses meets al-Khidr, referred in the Quran as "one from among Our servants whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Ourselves,"^{[Qur'an 18:65 [1]]} at the junction of the two seas and asks for permission to accompany him so Moses can learn "right knowledge of what [he has] been taught".^{[Qur'an 18:66 [2]]}

Al-Khidr, realizing that Moses had the Torah and divine knowledge to draw upon, informs him in a stern manner that their knowledge is of different nature and that "Surely [Moses] cannot have patience with me." Moses promised to be patient and obey al-Khidr, and they set out together.

After they board a ship, al-Khidr damages the vessel. Forgetting his oath to follow quietly, Moses says, "Have you made a hole in it to drown its inmates? Certainly you have done a grievous thing."

Al-Khidr reminds Moses of his warning, "Did I not say that you will not be able to have patience with me?" and Moses asks not to be rebuked.

Next, al-Khidr murders a young man. Moses again cries out in astonishment and dismay, and again al-Khidr reminds Moses of his warning, and Moses promises he will not violate his oath again. They then proceed to a town where they are denied hospitality.

This time, instead of harming anyone or anything, al-Khidr restores a decrepit wall in the village. Yet again Moses is amazed and violates his oath for the third and last time, asking why al-Khidr did not at least exact "some recompense for it!"

Al-Khidr replies, "This shall be separation between me and you; now I will inform you of the significance of that with which you could not have patience." Many acts which seem to be evil, malicious or somber, actually were merciful. The boat was damaged to prevent its owners from falling into the hands of "a king who seized every boat by force. ... And as for the boy, his parents were believers and we feared lest he should make disobedience and ingratitude to come upon them." God will replace the child with one better in purity, affection and obedience.

As for the restored wall, al-Khidr explained that underneath the wall was a treasure belonging to two hapless orphans whose father was a righteous man. As God's envoy, al-Khidr restored the wall, showing God's kindness by rewarding the piety of the orphans' father.

Reports in the Hadith

Among the strongest transmitted proofs about the life of al-Khidr are two reports, one narrated by Imam Ahmad in *al-Zuhd* whereby Muhammad is said to have stated that Ilyas and al-Khidr meet every year and spend the month of Ramadan in Jerusalem and the other narrated by Ya'qub ibn Sufyan from the 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz whereby a man he was seen walking with was actually al-Khidr. Ibn Hajar declared the chain of the first fair and that of the second sound in *Fath al-Bari* (1959 ed. 6:435). He goes on to cite another sound report narrated by ibn 'Asakir from Abu Zur'a al-Razi whereby the latter met al-Khidr twice, once in his young age, the other in his old age, but al-Khidr himself had not changed.

Al-Khidr is believed to be a man who has the appearance of a young adult but a long, white beard. According to some authors like Abdul Haq Vidhyarthi, al-Khidr is Xerxes (not to be confused with Xerxes I), who disappeared after being in the lake regions of Sijistan or Sistan that comprise the wetlands of the Irano-Afghan border today, and after finding the fountain of life, sought to live his entire remaining life in service of God and to help those in their path/journey to Him.

Bukhari reports that al-Khidr got his name after he was present over the surface of some ground that became green as a result of his presence there. There are reports from al-Bayhaqi in his *Dala'il an-Nubawwah* that al-Khidr was present at the funeral of Prophet Muhammad and was recognized only by Abu Bakr and Ali from amongst the rest of the companions, and where he came to show his grief and sadness at the passing away of the Prophet. Al-Khidr's appearance at Muhammad's funeral is related as follows: *A powerful-looking, fine-featured, handsome man with a white beard came leaping over the backs of the people till he reached where the sacred body lay. Weeping bitterly, he turned toward the Companions and paid his condolences. Abu Bakr and 'Ali said that he was Khidr.* (Ibn al-Jazari 1994, p. 228.)

In another narration al-Khidr met with Ali by the Kaabah and instructed him about a supplication that is very meritorious when recited after the obligatory prayers. It is reported by Imam Muslim that during the time when the false Messiah appears and as he approaches at the outskirts of the city of Medina, a believer would challenge him, whom the false Messiah will slice into two pieces and rejoin, making it appear that he caused him to die and be resurrected, to which this man would proclaim the falsehood of the Dajjal who would try again to kill him (or make show of it) but would fail and thus his weakness and inability being made revealed. According to the commentators and transmitters of this narration the person who will challenge the Antichrist and humiliate him will be al-Khidr.

Sidi Abd al-Aziz ad-Dabbagh is reported in *al-Ibriz* to have said about al-Khidr, that he is not a prophet but rather a saint who has the same status as that of the *ghawth* (a level where the saint acquires resemblance to the heart of Israfil) and who attained this status in front of God as a direct blessing without the aid of any spiritual guide.

The picture to the right shows al-Khidr to be meeting Dhul-Qarnayn.



Al-Khidr (right) and Dhul-Qarnayn, here referring to Alexander the Great in the Qur'an, marvel at the sight of a salted fish that comes back to life when touched by the Water of Life.

In Sufism

To Sufis, al-Khidr holds a very dear place. Although amongst the Sunni scholars there is a difference of opinion about him being still alive, amongst Sunni Sufis there is almost a consensus that al-Khidr is still alive, with many respected figures and shaykhs, and prominent leaders claiming having had personal encounters with him. Examples of those who had claim this are Ghawth Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Imam an-Nawawi, Muhyideen Ibn Arabi, Sidi Abd al-Aziz ad-Dabbagh and Ahmad ibn Idris al-Fasi. Ibn 'Ata' Allah in *Lata'if al-Minan* (1:84-98) states that there is consensus among the Sufis that al-Khidr is alive. In fact there are orders that claim origin with al-Khidr himself, or

that al-Khidr was part of their chain, for example some of the Naqshbandiyya, the Muhammadiyyah, the Idrisiyyah, and the Sanusiyyah are tariqahs that had al-Khidr as one of the central figures connecting them to the spiritual outflow of the Prophet Muhammad.

In Sufi tradition, al-Khidr has come to be known as one of those who receive illumination direct from God without human mediation. He is the hidden initiator of those who walk the mystical path, like some of those from the Uwaisi tariqa. Uwaisis are those who enter the mystical path without being initiated by a living master. Instead they begin their mystical journey either by following the guiding light of the teachings of the earlier masters or by being initiated by the mysterious prophet-saint al-Khidr.

Al-Khidr has thus gained enormous reputation and popularity in the Sufi tradition due to his role of an initiator. Through this way come several Sufi orders which claim initiation through al-Khidr and consider him their master. Al-Khidr had thus come to symbolize access to the divine mystery (*ghayb*) itself. In the writings of Abd al-Karim al-Jili, al-Khidr rules over 'the Men of the Unseen' (*rijalu'l-ghayb*)—the exalted saints and angels. Al-Khidr is also included among what in classical Sufism are called the *abdāl* ('those who take turns'). In a divinely-instituted hierarchy of such saints, al-Khidr holds the rank of their spiritual head.

Sufis draw many analogies supporting natural theology from this Qur'anic passage, such as the need for earthquakes to act in contrast to earth's stability, disease to contrast good health, and countless other analogies. The question of accountability raised by some is answered through the fact that al-Khidr was acting as God's envoy and not according to his personal judgment.

The Sri Lankan Sufi Bawa Muhaiyaddeen gives a unique account of al-Khidr. Al-Khidr was on a long search for God, until God, out of his mercy, sends the Archangel Gabriel to guide him. Gabriel appears to al-Khidr as a wise human sage, and al-Khidr accepts him as his teacher. Gabriel teaches al-Khidr much in the same way as al-Khidr later teaches Moses in the Qur'an, by carrying out seemingly unjust actions. Al-Khidr repeatedly breaks his oath not to speak out against Gabriel's actions, and is still unaware that the human teacher is actually Gabriel. Gabriel then explains his actions, and reveals his true angelic form to al-Khidr. Al-Khidr recognises him as the Archangel Gabriel, and then Gabriel bestows a spiritual title upon al-Khidr, by calling him *Hayat Nabi*, the Eternal Life Prophet.

The French scholar of Sufism, Henry Corbin, interprets al-Khidr as the mysterious prophet, the eternal wanderer. The function of al-Khidr as a 'person-archetype' is to reveal each disciple to himself, to lead each disciple to his own theophany, because that theophany corresponds to his own 'inner heaven,' to the form of his own being, to his eternal individuality. Accordingly, Al-Khidr is Moses' spiritual guide, who initiates Moses into the divine sciences, and reveals to him the secret mystic truth.

In Shi'ite

Many Shi'ites believe al-Khidr accompanied the Twelfth Imām, Muhammad al-Mahdi, in meeting one Sheikh Hassan ibn Muthlih Jamkarani, on 22 February 984 CE (17 Ramadan 373 A.H.) and instructing him to build a mosque at that site of their meeting, known as Jamkaran.^{[3] [4]} The site, six kilometres east of Qom, Iran, has been a pilgrimage destination for the Shi'ah for some time. In the last few years, however, it has become very popular, particularly with young people, and drawn crowds of tens of thousands.^[5]

The Shia believe that this is the point where the Mahdi will reappear and are often seen putting letters down a well where they believe he will re-emerge. One of the most prominent believers is the current President Ahmadinejad who has invested large sums of money in developing the area.

In Ahmadiyya

Ahmadiyya Muslims believe that the Quranic passage of Moses' encounter with the "Servant of God" is closely linked, contextually to the subject matter of surah Al Kahf in which his story or parable is cited. According to Ahmadi exegesis on *al-Kahf*, which draws upon external and internal, religious and historical evidence to show that Moses' journey towards, and his experience with the "servant of God" was not physical but by way of vision, similar to the Mi'raj (ascension) of Muhammad.

The righteous 'servant of God' otherwise known as al-Khidr is not believed to be a historical figure but rather a symbolic figure who signifies the person of Muhammad whom Moses had desired to see and whom he saw in this vision. Muhammad has been called the 'servant of God' in many places within the Qur'an and is believed to be the servant of God *par excellence* who has been called a *mercy to the whole world*;^{[Qur'an 21:108 [6]]} he is also believed to have been vouchsafed divine knowledge in a very large measure.

The place of the meeting of the two seas signifies the time when the Mosaic dispensation meets the Islamic dispensation, i.e. when the Mosaic dispensation will be superseded by the Islamic one.^[7]

The first action of "the servant of God" of making a hole in the boat is interpreted as signifying the commandments laid down by Muhammad which would, as it were make a hole in the boat, which in spiritual terms denotes worldly riches, i.e. he would see to it that wealth is fairly distributed and does not accumulate in the hands of a few. The "poor people" to whom the boat belonged represent the Muslims, and making a hole in it means that Islam would exhort its followers to spend in the way of God by way of Zakat and charity that would seem to be a source of economic weakness, but in fact would be one of economic strength and prosperity.

The tyrant king who confiscates the boats were the Byzantine and Persian Empires who would have seized Arabia had it not seemed to them a poor and barren land not worth conquering. Thus the Arabian land in which Muhammad was to appear, represented as the damaged boat had been safeguarded from being conquered or "taken by force".

The youth, is interpreted as ignorance, strength and wild impulses, thus the second action of the "servant of God", the killing of the youth signifies that the teachings of his religion would require its followers to bring about a veritable death over their carnal desires and passions. The source of these carnal desires, impulses and passions is the human body and soul combined, from which all moral qualities spring. Islamic theology holds that every human is born virtuous, thus because his parents have been called "believers", this means that the believers may be dragged into vice by the impulses represented as the "youth". Islam seeks to eradicate these impulses and leaves man with the soul and body combined to develop along beneficent lines to achieve the high purpose of human life.

Then Moses and the "servant of God" approach a town, ask its people for food and are refused to be accepted as guests. This signifies that both Moses and Muhammad would seek co-operation from Jews and Christians but it would be denied. The two orphan boys to whom the wall belonged are Moses and Jesus and their 'righteous' father is Abraham. Their treasure was the true teaching bequeathed by them to their peoples, which was in danger of being lost due to the latter's irreligiousness. Thus the third act of the 'servant of God' (Muhammad) of rebuilding the wall signifies that the treasure or true teachings were to be safeguarded in the Quran, so that they (the people of Moses and Jesus) may accept it after having awakened to a realization of the truth of the Quranic teachings.^[8]

Relation to other stories

Al-Khidr also figures into the *Alexander Romance* as a servant of Alexander the Great. Al-Khidr and Alexander cross the Land of Darkness to find the Water of Life. Alexander gets lost looking for the spring, but al-Khidr finds it and gains eternal life (see Alexander the Great in the Qur'an).

Some scholars suggest that al-Khidr is also represented in the Arthurian tale, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as the Green Knight.^[9] In the story, the Green Knight tempts the faith of Sir Gawain three times. The character of al-Khidr may have come into European literature through the mixing of cultures during the Crusades.

It is also possible that the story derives from an Irish myth which predates the Crusades in which Cuchulainn and two other heroes compete for the champion's portion at feasts; ultimately, Cuchulainn is the only one willing to let a giant—actually a king who has magically disguised himself—cut off his head, as per their agreement.

The story is also similar to one told in the Talmud of a journey made by the prophet Elijah and Rabbi Jochanan.^[10] The first house where they stay the night belongs to a pious old couple who give the prophet and the rebbe the best of their food and beds. However, the couple's cow dies in the night. Elijah later explains that the Angel of Death came and he persuaded the angel to take the cow instead of the wife. The next house, as in the al-Khidr story, is that of a rich miser, and Elijah repairs his wall so that he will not, in having it repaired, find the treasure hidden under it. This story could have been adapted by religious figures to suit Elijah, taking the essence away from Moses having to learn from someone else. This could have been seen to belittle Moses. Hence was adapted to suit someone else.

See also

- Malamatiyya
- Muslim views on the intercession of saints
- Saint George#Interfaith Shrine
- The Green Man
- Mahis
- Jamkaran

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External links

- Comprehensive site on Al-Khidr ^[13]
- Shrine Devoted to Al-Khidr ^[14]
- Article Claiming Al-Khidr Is Still Alive ^[15]

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