

**THE IMPACT OF THE FIGURE OF KHIDR ON MEDIEVAL SŪFĪ
THOUGHT**

by

HAMZA ELHADI MOHAMAD TAMTAM

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Department of Theology and Religion

School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion

College of Arts and Law of

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Abstract

This thesis examines the effect of the figure of Khidr on medieval Sūfīs, who claimed that Khidr had provided them with a microcosm of the heart of the Sūfī path. It has sought to answer the following questions: who is this servant of God (Khidr), who specifically is it that is mentioned in the short story with a lack of information in the Chapter of the Cave in the Qur’ān (18:60-82), and how have medieval Sūfīs analysed his story with the Prophet Moses? This study also explores the reasons that Sūfīs have been criticized for their understanding of Khidr’s story. In pursuing these questions, this study will attempt to shine a new light on these debates. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the most important relevant literature to the research questions. Chapter 2 gives an overview of Sūfī sources for understanding the figure of Khidr in order to gain insight into what makes Khidr important. Prophet Muḥammad’s evaluation of both Khidr and Moses in the story is also discussed. In Chapter 3, the study debates the matter of how could Khidr teach Prophet Moses knowledge that the latter did not have. Does this refer to or necessitate Khidr having a higher rank than Moses? What is the knowledge that was bestowed on Khidr? And can it be revealed to other than Khidr? Chapter 4 concentrates on the relationship between the knowledge of Khidr and the Sūfī method of interpretation on one hand, and how Sūfī exegetes read the story of Khidr, on the other hand. Chapter 5 aims to explore the impact of Khidr on medieval Sūfī literature, in addition to the broader literary impact of Sūfī heritage during and after that period in an effort to answer the question of Khidr’s place within this tradition. Chapter 6 presents the key findings and the contribution of the study.

Dedication

To my lovely kids Tameem and Taim Allāh

Contents

Abstract.....	1
Contents.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	5
Transliteration.....	7
Abbreviations.....	9
Note on the Referencing System	10
Introduction	1
Rationale and Research Questions	1
Methodology:	4
0.1 Overview of the study	5
0.2 Objectives.....	9
0.3 Limitations.....	10
Chapter 1: Literature Review	11
1.1 Introduction	11
1.2 Classical and Medieval Sources:	11
1.2.1 Religious Texts:	11
1.2.1.1 The Qur’ān Text.....	11
1.2.1.2 The Ḥadīth Text.....	12
1.2.2 The Primary Sources of the Medieval Age.....	14
1.2.3 Modern Literature	21
1.2.5 Conclusion.....	21
Chapter 2: Sources for Sūfī Understanding of the Figure of Khidr: The Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, and Narratives and Tales about Khidr.....	37
2.1 The Qur’ān and Ḥadīth	37
2.1.1 Khidr in the Qur’ān.....	37
2.1.2 The Background to the Story of Moses and Khidr in the Qur’ān	38
2.1.3 The Qur’ānic Narrative of Moses and Khidr.....	39
2.1.2 Khidr in the Ḥadīth	41
2.2.1 The Reasons behind Moses' Journey	42
2.2.2 The Events in the Story	46
2.2.3 Analysis of the Dialogue between Moses and Khidr in the Story	47

2.2.4 The Evaluation of Moses and Khidr by the Prophet Muḥammad	50
2.2.5 Interpretation of Events.....	50
2.2.6 The Person of the 'Servant of God' (Khidr), and the Time Period of the Story.....	51
2.2 Sūfī Narratives and Tales about Khidr	52
2.3 The Nature of the Figure of Khidr	56
2.3.1 Introduction	56
2.3.2 Is Khidr a Prophet or a saint?	56
2.3.3 Is Khidr Still Alive or Has He Passed Away?.....	59
2.4 Conclusion.....	63
Chapter 3:.....	65
Khidr's Symbolism in Medieval Sūfī Beliefs.....	65
3.1 Introduction	65
3.2 Khidr: The Question of the Superiority of Saints Over Prophets	67
3.3 Khidr: A Symbol of Esoteric Knowledge.....	87
3.4 Conclusion	97
Chapter 4:.....	99
The symbolism of the Esoteric Knowledge in Sūfī exegesis: The Qur'ānic Story of Khidr as Model....	99
4.1 Introduction	99
4.2 The definition of the Sūfī interpretation and its relationship with the knowledge of Khidr (the Esoteric Knowledge).....	101
4.3 The esoteric interpretation of the story of Khidr.....	106
4.3.1 Al-Qushayrī's interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr	107
4.3.2 Maybudī's interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr	112
4.3.3 Al-Kāshānī's interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr.....	116
4.4 A Comparative Analysis of the Three Medieval Sūfī Interpretations	121
4.4.1 The Reasons behind the Story.....	121
4.4.2 The Master-disciple Relationship.....	122
4.4.3 Khidr's Three Actions	125
4.5 Conclusion.....	131
Chapter 5:.....	131
Khidr's Symbolism in Medieval Sūfī Literature	134
5.1 Introduction	134
5.2 Khidr symbolism in Sūfī Poetry.....	134
5.2.1 Aṭṭār. Abū Ḥamīd bin Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm Farīd al-dīn	135

5.2.1.1	<i>Ilāhī-Nāma</i> or, Book of God	135
5.2.1.2	In Praise of the Prophet:	136
5.2.1.3	Invocation of the Spirit	137
5.2.1.4	Story of the Virtuous Woman Whose Husband Had Gone on a Journey	137
5.2.1.2	Conference of the Birds (<i>Manṭiq-ut-Ṭayr</i>):	138
5.2.2	Jalāluddīn Muhammad Rūmī	140
5.2.2.1	The Prophet's Counsels to Ali to Follow the Direction of the Pir or Spiritual Guide, and to Endure his Chastisements Patiently:	141
5.2.2.2	Ali, the Lion of God	143
5.2.2.3	The Man Whose Calling 'O God 'Was Equivalent to God's Answering Him' Here Am I'	145
5.2.2.4	Teachings on the Friend of God's Relationship to law <i>sharī'a</i>	145
5.2.3	Ibn 'Arabī	147
5.3	Khidr's Symbolism in Sūfī Prose	149
5.3.1	Khidr in Folk Literature:	150
5.3.2	Khidr in (Short Stories)	153
5.3.3	Travellers and Khidr	156
5.4	Conclusion	157
Chapter 6:	159
Conclusion	159
Appendix 1	184
Bibliography:	200

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Transliteration

Library of Congress Arabic Transliteration System

ء	‘	ض	ḍ
ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	‘
ج	J	غ	gh
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	هـ	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ي	y

Vowels

Long		Short	
ا	ā	َ	A
ي	ī	ِ	I
و	ū	ُ	U

Abbreviations

CE	The Common Era calendar or The Gregorian calendar
b.	Born
d.	Died
ed.	Edition
n.d	No date
Transl.	Translator
Vol.	Volume
P	Page
PP	Pages
Univ	University
Q	Qur'ān

Note on the Referencing System

The referencing system adopted in the thesis is the Harvard system in accordance with the School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion guidelines. Footnotes are also used throughout the thesis to offer a brief description of characters. The dating system that will be using is the Common Era (CE) system.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate one of the more obscure figures mentioned in the Qur'ān (18:60-82), known as Khidr, and to explore the traditional Islamic understanding of Khidr's story. Through an analysis of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth texts, along with the interpretations of medieval Sūfī commentators, this study will try to draw out the links between Khidr and medieval Sūfī understanding. Historically, Sūfī commentators claimed that Khidr provided them with a microcosm of the heart of the Sūfī path. Khidr had relevance for them in a variety of topics, not only in the scope of belief and exegesis, but also in literature, leading to disputes between Islamic scholars regarding the understanding of this figure in medieval Sūfism. Therefore, this study aims to analyse and evaluate the relationship between the figure of Khidr and medieval Sūfism in each of the following categories: belief, exegesis, and literature.

Rationale and Research Questions

The figure of Khidr is presented with the Prophet Moses in the Qur'ān, in the chapter of the Cave (Q18:60-82), but relatively little information is provided, especially about the nature of this figure. Despite this, Khidr has become a popular subject and holds a prominent position in the medieval Sūfī tradition. Khidr, in medieval Sūfism, was considered as a supreme *Imām* (leader) and *walī* (saint), who is still alive since he had drunk from the water of immortality (*mā' al-ḥayāt*) (Halman, 2013, p. 6). In addition, many of the *walīs* that people love, and respect have claimed to have met Khidr¹. Such a meeting is a great honour for a *walī* and raises him far above his peers. Therefore, a great number of righteous medieval Sūfīs have claimed to have met Khidr during their journeys, that he gave them advice, answered their questions and inspired them. Ibn 'Arabī (d.1240), for

¹ Franke Patrick in his study *Begegnung mit Khidr* mentioned about 150 stories for those who claimed to have met with Khidr.

instance, claimed to have met Khidr three times and received a *khirqa*² (mantle of initiation) from him (Corbin, 2013, p. 35). Therefore, Khidr has “come to symbolize a third path³ by which knowledge of God could be gained, giving man access to the divine mystery (*ghayb*) itself” (Massignon, & Mason, 1994, p. 54).

Sunni scholars⁴, on the other hand, have argued that many problems would be solved if it could be proved that Khidr was a prophet and not a saint (*walī*). What is meant by “many problems” includes the following set of beliefs:

- 1) the question of the superiority of saints over prophets
- 2) saints and esoteric knowledge
- 3) the esoteric interpretations of the Qur’ān
- 4) the belief of the master-disciple relationship

This, therefore, raises the following questions: who is this servant of God (Khidr), the mentor of Moses, who has been specifically mentioned in the short story in the Chapter of the Cave in the Qur’ān (18:60-82)? And how medieval Sūfīs have analysed and developed the theme of Khidr’s companionship with Moses to articulate and legitimate the mentoring relationship between guide and disciple along with the types of knowledge and mystical states produced by this story. This study also explores the reasons why Sūfīs have been criticized for their understanding of Khidr’s story. In raising these questions, this study will attempt to shed a new light on these debates.

² A *khirqa* is "the initiatory cloak of the Sūfī chain of spirituality, with which esoteric knowledge is passed from the *Murshid* or the *Shaikh* to the aspirant *murīd* " (Hoffman, 1995, p. 18).

³ The other two paths are the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth.

⁴ This claim found in Ibn Ḥajar’s book *al-zahar al-naḍār fī hāl Al-Khidr*, (2004, p.50). He argued that many scholars believe that.

To explore these questions, this work calls for attention to the Qur'ānic text and the two principal genres of Qur'ānic exegesis: Ḥadīth and *tafsīr*. Being a work on Sūfism, this study pays particular attention to the Sūfī Qur'ānic commentary and its contemporary historical context. In Chapter Two, this study analyzes the Qur'ānic story and explores its exegetical contexts through presenting the core of the story as it appears in the Qur'ān. Then, the thesis moves on to integrate the Ḥadīth, which is considered the first commentary on the Qur'ānic text, in order to investigate what makes Khidr important. After establishing this context, we will present the origins of the dispute over the nature of Khidr as there is strong evidence to back both claims that he was a prophet or a saint. Although the controversy has yet be resolved, it may be of interest to illustrate the methodology and argumentation of those who dealt with this issue. Khidr and Moses are engaged in a teaching relationship, which also leads us to consider the concept of sainthood, its relation to prophethood, as Moses is a Prophet and Khidr a saint, and the nature of their knowledge. This is under the consideration of Chapter Three.

Chapter Four supplements Chapter Three by examining the exegetical Sūfī sources which interpret and apply this Qur'ānic narrative. We will analyse how this Islamic exegetical tradition, as a genre of Qur'ānic commentary, has been applied to the story of Moses' journey with Khidr, focusing on its importance, its relationship to Khidr's actions with Moses and the practice of mentoring or spiritual guidance in Islam's mystical tradition of Sūfism. This chapter provides a summary, and analysis of three significant Sūfī Qur'ān commentaries which treat the narrative of Moses and Khidr (18:60-82), the emphasis being on the additions which they made to the Qur'ānic narrative itself, and their interpretations of the meaning of the story. Finally, we proceed to consider the evolution and variation of the role of Khidr in a variety of literary sources to examine the continuing relevance of Khidr.

Methodology:

To investigate the questions mentioned above, this research will adopt a historical method for the main chapters of the thesis. The next step is to collect data related to the questions of the present study from different types of classical medieval and modern sources. The study focuses on Sūfī writers and classical medieval scholars that were the main part of the ongoing debate under consideration in this study. We will then move to later Muslim scholars who are still a part of the ongoing debate and Western scholarship, which is engaged in a different debate. They all use different methodological approaches that will be used in this research, to balance the representation of the variety of Sūfī views of the understanding of Khidr. In order to achieve this, the author collected many books and articles by accessing different academic centres such as the University of Birmingham, in addition to personal collections.

The use of both classical medieval and modern sources through the study's chapters will be conducted by the following two main steps. First, the research will present an overview of the two kinds of sources, classical medieval and modern. The author will adopt the approach of Garraghan (1946) in applying external criticism to primary sources by examining the quality of the sources themselves in terms of type, accuracy, credibility, validity, and relevance of the information of those sources to the field of research.

The discussion of modern sources will use Rampolla's (2012) method for assessing modern sources, which focuses on the aim of the written work, the approach, and the main discussions. However, the method will be centered upon answering the main questions of this study by scanning several modern studies to see whether they have analysed or evaluated the discussion about Khidr in the medieval Sūfī age.

In the second step, the author will adopt the historical method throughout the chapters of study by creating an internal criticism on collected information from primary sources through the main topics of the thesis. This will be conducted by placing each topic in its historical context and then

examining it in light of primary source accounts while taking the chronological order into consideration. More clearly, the discussion of each issue will adopt the method of comparative textual analysis by examining two or more accounts offered by several primary sources or reported by the same source but in different accounts. It will consider the question of to what extent the given accounts agree or disagree on the issues relating to the understanding of the story of Moses and Khidr and investigate the reasons behind the agreement and disagreement.

Furthermore, to develop the tools of the current study, its major topics will be assessed in the light of previous views or hypotheses that are produced by modern sources. When a topic has been highlighted by modern sources or there is a hypothesis relating to the topic, it will be assessed by placing the previous views in the context of the topic by using two approaches. In the first approach, previous views or hypotheses can be placed at the beginning of the context of the topic before evaluating accounts selected from primary sources. This approach will be adopted in case the author would like to argue these views or hypotheses while taking into account new details that may not have been examined before. Second, if the question has not been debated before or there are already discussions with the same primary source information, the discussion will be adopted by examining details recorded by classical and medieval sources first, then debating the relevant views. Interestingly, the logic of the referencing order in this chapter is not chronological, rather it is according to the order of the thesis chapter's first, and the most important item/aspect relevant to the topic.

This method will be used to critically examine the accounts of sources highlighted in the literature review. However, most of the primary sources mentioned in this thesis have already been translated into English. Although I have routinely quoted existing English translations of Arabic primary sources, I have nonetheless cross-checked such translations against the original Arabic texts, amending the translations accordingly whenever they appeared unclear or failed to capture a particular nuance in the original.

0.1 Overview of the study

This study is divided into six chapters, in addition to an introduction, and appendices:

Chapter 1: Literature Review.

This chapter will first outline the most important classical and medieval sources, which will be discussed under two categories: Religious texts, which include the Qur’ānic text and the Ḥadīth text, and the primary sources of medieval Sūfism. The aim of this part is to provide a general overview of the most important sources and the rationale behind their use to answer the research questions. The second stage of this chapter will consist of several studies in modern research. The aim of this part is to highlight the current/modern literature and debate on this topic. This includes modern day Muslim scholars who are an extant part of the debate and Western scholarship, which is engaged in a different debate as they seek to evaluate the discussion about Khidr in the Medieval Age.

Chapter 2: Sources for Sūfī Understanding of the Figure of Khidr: The Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, Narratives and Tales about Khidr

Chapter 2 aims to answer the question of how the Qur’ān and Ḥadīths present the story of Khidr in order to gain insight into what makes Khidr important and how Prophet Muḥammad evaluated both Khidr and Moses in the story. This chapter consists of an introduction and three sections. The introduction presents the outline of the chapter. The first section, which consists of two parts, is concerned with Khidr in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth. The second section focuses on narratives and tales about Khidr, in order to fully understand the figure of Khidr. The third and final section of Chapter 2 is entitled, “The Nature of the Figure of Khidr”. Each of the three sections is outlined as follows:

As mentioned above, Section 1 of Chapter 2 consists of two parts: Khidr in the Qur’ān and Khidr in the Ḥadīth Two issues are covered in Part 1 of Section 1 - Khidr in the Qur’ān:

- 1) The background to the story of Moses and Khidr.

- 2) The Qur'ānic narrative of Moses and Khidr (Q18:60-82).

In Part 2 of Section 1 - Khidr in the Ḥadīth, six aspects will be covered as follows:

- 1) The reasons for Moses' journey.
- 2) The events that happened in the story.
- 3) An analysis of the dialogue between Moses and Khidr in the story.
- 4) An evaluation of both Moses and Khidr by Prophet Muḥammad.
- 5) An interpretation of the events that happened in the story.
- 6) The person of the Servant of God (Khidr) and the time period of the story.

Section 2 of Chapter 2 is “Sūfī Narratives and Tales about Khidr”. This section aims to explore more information about the figure of Khidr.

Section 3 of this chapter is The Nature of the Figure of Khidr. This section will concentrate on the nature of Khidr by answering two questions: 1) Was Khidr considered a prophet or a saint: and 2) According to Sūfī Is Khidr still alive, or has he passed away?

Chapter 3: Khidr's Symbolism in Medieval Sūfī Beliefs.

This chapter consists of three sections:

- 1) Khidr: The Question of the Superiority of saints Over prophets
- 2) Khidr: A Symbol of Esoteric Knowledge.
- 3) Conclusion.

-This chapter aims to answer the following questions:

How could Khidr teach the Prophet Moses knowledge that the latter did not know? Does this refer to or necessitate Khidr having a higher rank than Moses?

-What is the knowledge that was bestowed on Khidr? And can it be revealed to other than Khidr?

In other words, is the verse Q 18:65⁵ applicable only to Khidr, or can it be applied to other saints as well?

Chapter 4: The Symbolism of Esoteric Knowledge in Sūfī exegesis: The Qur’ānic Story of Khidr as a Role Model

This chapter is divided into three main sections:

- 1) The definition of the Sūfī method of interpretation, and its relationship with the Qur’ānic story of Moses and Khidr.
- 2) The esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ānic story of Moses and Khidr by three medieval Sūfī interpretations.
- 3) A comparative analysis of the three medieval Sūfī texts discussed in Section 2.

The first section clarifies the definition of Sūfī interpretation, its historical context, and its relationship with the Qur’ānic story of Moses and Khidr. To fully understand the methods of medieval Sūfī interpretation on the one hand, and its relationship to the Qur’ānic story of Khidr on the other hand, Section 2 of this chapter will examine three significant medieval Sūfī interpretations. Section 3 is a comparative analysis of the three medieval Sūfī texts mentioned in Section 2.

The main concern of this chapter is to investigate the relationship between esoteric knowledge and Sūfī exegesis. It attempts to answer these questions: how did Sūfī exegetes read the story of Khidr, and how did the story impact on medieval Sūfī interpretations?

Chapter 5: Khidr’s Symbolism in Medieval Sūfī Literature

⁵ “And found one of Our servants— a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own”.

This chapter consists of two main sections:

- 1) Khidr's symbolism in Sūfī Poetry, which centres on three major medieval Sūfī poets: Aṭṭār (d. 1222), Rūmī (d. 1237), and Ibn 'Arabī (d.1240).
- 2) Khidr' symbolism in Sūfī Prose, which consists of three parts:
 - Khidr in folk literature.
 - Khidr in (short stories).
 - Travellers and Khidr.

This chapter aims to explore the impact of Khidr on medieval Sūfī literature, or those who were impacted by Sūfī heritage. It aims to answer the question of how Khidr can be placed within this tradition.

Chapter 6: Conclusion. This chapter presents the key findings and the contribution of the study.

This thesis is followed by one appendix which consists of the full translations of the story of Khidr by the three medieval Sūfī authors mentioned in chapter 3, section 2.

0.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are firstly to explore the Sūfī background to the understanding of the figure of Khidr, the text of both the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, and the narratives and tales about Khidr. This is to see how Sūfis employed these sources to understand the story of Khidr. The following chapter will explore the impact of Khidr in Sūfī belief, to understand the knowledge of Khidr and its impact on Sūfī beliefs. The objectives of the next chapter will be focused on the link between Sūfī interpretation methods and the knowledge of Khidr, and illustrate the relationship between an esoteric and exoteric interpretation of the text of the Qur'ān on one hand, and their relationship with the story of Moses and Khidr on the other. The following chapter will explore how the figure of Khidr has travelled far beyond a religious figure and how this has been employed with literature.

The last chapter summarizes all that has been covered in this thesis, and will also outline its contributions to this field.

0.3 Limitations

This study is unable to explore all Sūfī schools of the understanding of the story of Khidr. The reader should bear in mind that the study is based on medieval Sūfī interpretations of the story of Khidr. That is because there was a great deal of discussion concerning Khidr during this period.

The research considered the hypothesis that Khidr can be understood through the texts of both the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, which are considered the two main resources for understanding Qur'ānic stories, including the story of Khidr. However, a third resource is employed to understand the figure of Khidr, which are narratives and tales about Khidr.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Considerable literature exists in this current research, written by both Islamic and Western scholars in Arabic and English languages, in particular, pertaining to the medieval Sūfī understanding of the figure of Khidr. This chapter aims to outline the sources that will be mentioned, and why they are used in this analysis. This will be conducted through divided them into two parts:

- 1- Classical and Medieval Sources
- 2- Modern Sources

1.2 Classical and Medieval Sources:

The aim of this part is to highlight the most important sources related to the specific areas of the study. Two categories will be discussed under the ‘classical and medieval sources’: Religious texts, which includes the Qur’ānic text, the Ḥadīth text; and then the primary sources of classical Medieval Age. The examination of the reliability, authenticity, and credibility of those accounts will be established in detail through the main chapters while debating the research questions.

1.2.1 Religious Texts:

According to the Qur’ān, Khidr is a mysterious figure who accompanies Moses on a series of adventures. He is later named Khidr by Prophet Muḥammad and became a popular subject for later authors, most prominently Sūfis. The text of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth are considered two of the main resources for understanding the figure of Khidr. As a result, how the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth present the story of Khidr should be explored, to identify what makes Khidr important, and how Prophet Muḥammad evaluated both Khidr and Moses in the story.

1.2.1.1 The Qur’ān Text

According to Islamic belief one of the primary sources of the prophets’ stories is the Qur’ān, which can provide useful information about them, including the Prophet Moses, who is the most frequently mentioned in the Qur’ān. One of his stories mentioned in the Qur’ān is with the figure

of Khidr. The story of Khidr is a short story that is mentioned in the Qur'ān once. This is unusual when compared to the other events in the story of Moses in the Qur'ān, which are repeated many times. The story is in the eighteenth chapter of the Qur'ān, which positions it in the middle of the Qur'ān, and the story itself is in the middle of this chapter. It is 22 verses. While the Qur'ān has no definition of this 'servant of God', it nevertheless has described him as a wise, knowledgeable and merciful person. This description provides a means of reflection on the nature of Khidr, especially his knowledge. It is of note that all of the narratives of the Qur'ān in this current study include chapter 18:60-82 and will be discussed using Abdel Haleem, M.A.S. (2005)⁶. English Translation.

1.2.1.2 The Ḥadīth Text

The Ḥadīth text presents significant information about the figure of Khidr with the Prophet Moses. There are, in fact, many narrations with some extra details about Khidr in the Ḥadīth account. However, the study in this regard focuses on both al-Bukhārī (d. 870), and Muslim (d. 875), who provided similar information about Khidr, while using the translation of Dr Muhsin Khan. They are considered the earliest narrations wherein Khidr appears in an authoritative Ḥadīth collection. In addition, their collections are regarded as solid and sound among Muslims.

Al-Bukhārī's accounts of Khidr in his Ḥadīth collection appear in three chapters, which are the "book of knowledge", the "book of wages" and the "book of stipulations". However, most of the collections regarding the story appear in the "book of knowledge", which has two sections (*Bab*). Section 16, which is mostly narrated by Ibn 'Abbās, is entitled "What has been said about the journey of Prophet Moses [when he went] in the sea to meet Khidr". Chapter 19 of al-Bukhārī's "book of knowledge" is entitled "To go out in search of knowledge".

⁶ (Oxford World's Classics).

Other Ḥadīth books will also be employed in this current study especially if they mention new information or different narrations with extra information about Khidr. All of the narratives of the Ḥadīth text in this study that include the story of Moses and Khidr will be discussed through using the Dr. Muhsin Khan Translation.

This study shall also explore how Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d.923)⁷ commented on the Qur’ānic story of Khidr. This is not only because some Sūfī traditions regarding Khidr can be traced back to al-Ṭabarī on some issues, for example with regard to some Ḥadīth texts, and concerning an understanding of Khidr's knowledge. But also, al-Ṭabarī's classical Qur’ānic interpretation *Jāmi’ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān* is regarded as one of the comprehensive interpretations, and it is one of the most widely read. This interpretation is also based on *tafsīr bi’ al-ma’thūr*, which includes *tafsīr* by the Qur’ān itself as well as by Ḥadīth text. An additional basis for the use of al-Ṭabarī is that this interpretation also looks at the generation of the prophet (*al-sālaf al-ṣāliḥ*), to see how the companions of the prophet dealt with the story. However, al-Ṭabarī has been challenged in recent scholarship by Walid A. Saleh (2006, p.12). He argues that Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha‘labī (d.1035) was an influential exegete who provided clusters of exegetical traditions on prophetic narrative that do not feature in al-Ṭabarī which were equally important, including for the Sūfī tradition. Walid Saleh has concluded that:

One of the surprising discoveries of my work was the paucity of evidence proving that al-Ṭabarī’s work was in fact as influential as we are accustomed to believe. Significant as al-Ṭabarī was, I was forced to conclude that he was not the major architect of the tradition he is widely believed to be. Al-Tha‘labī’s work, however, appears to have been the starting point of the major subsequent Qur’ānic commentators. One does not need to look deeply

⁷ There is an English translation of al-Ṭabarī’s introduction to his Tafsīr in *The Commentary on the Qur’ān*, translated by J. Cooper. Oxford University Press, 1987 (Sands, 2006, p.148).

into the works of these writers to recognize his influence, his sentences, and his preferences.

Later commentators could not avoid him. His was a work that towered above all (2006, p.12).

In fact, as Walid Saleh said, this is a very surprising contribution. However, this is unlike what Roberto Tottoli argued in his book *Biblical prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim literature* (2009, pp.146-48), under the title of *the literary genre of the stories of the prophets*. The author made a comparison between al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī in this section and he argued that: [Al-Thaʿlabī] “wrote a very substantial commentary, following the example of al-Ṭabarī, however, he did not achieve the fame of the major commentators like that of al-Ṭabarī” he adds that al-Thaʿlabī “comprise a voluminous work, rich in the traditions and accounts ordered in chapters dedicated to single prophets. Among the sources utilised, the first position belongs without any doubt to al-Ṭabarī of whom al-Thaʿlabī had at his disposition universal history and Qurʾānic commentary, which he made extensive use of, even if he did not give precise indications of the use being made of that source" (2009, pp.146-48).

While the disputation between scholars is acknowledged, al-Ṭabarī's works will be only considered under the headings of Ḥadīth.

In general, many religious sources supply valuable details about the figure of Khidr. There is also, however, a lack of reliable information about Khidr within these sources. Two important issues are the identity and the nature of Khidr, which opens the door of discussion for later authors, most prominently medieval Sūfīs.

1.2.2 The Primary Sources of the Medieval Age.

The attention paid to the figure of Khidr by medieval Sūfī authors is based on their beliefs that Khidr is still alive, that he has meetings with them, that he gives them advice, answers their questions, and protects them. Therefore, several medieval Sūfī sources present significant information about Khidr. Perhaps one of the most important and relevant sources in this regard is

the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī (d.1240). Ibn ‘Arabī is considered by some practitioners of Sūfism as “the Great Spiritual Master”, and his theology strongly influenced Sūfism during the Medieval Period. He has authored many books, and his more well-known works give a unique account of the story of Khidr. These works include *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ‘*The Ringstones of Wisdom*’ translated by Aisha Bewley; and *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, *the Meccan Revelations*. These source outline most of the discussion about Khidr, in particular under the title *the seal of the Wisdom of Sublimity in the Word of Moses* in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* ‘*The Ringstones of Wisdom*. Khidr in Ibn ‘Arabī’s account was considered their supreme *Imām* (leader) and saint (*walī*), who is still alive, since he drank from the water of immortality (*mā’ al-ḥayāt*). Some of the saints that people love and respect have claimed that they have met Khidr. Such a meeting is a high honour for a saint, and raises him far above his peers. Therefore, some righteous medieval Sūfīs claimed to have met Khidr during their journeys; he gave them advice, answered their questions and inspired them. Ibn ‘Arabī claimed to have met Khidr three times and received a *khirqā* from him. A *khirqā* is "the initiatory cloak of the Sūfī chain of spirituality, with which esoteric knowledge is passed from the *murshid* or the *Shaikh* to the aspirant *murīd*" (Hoffman, 1995, p.18). Therefore, Khidr has "come to symbolize a third path by which knowledge of God could be gained, giving man access to the divine mystery (*ghayb*) itself " (Massignon, & Mason, 1994, p.54).

For the current research, the significance of such books is their provision of valuable details concerning the identity of the figure Khidr and their development of the understanding of the figure of Khidr concerning the relationship between prophets and saints, in terms of knowledge and the master-disciple relationship.

Due to this development in understanding of the story of Moses and Khidr, many scholars critique, and evaluate Ibn ‘Arabī’s work. For example, Ibn Taymīyah, who was born 30 years after Ibn ‘Arabī’s death, was one of the most influential traditional scholars in recent times and is known as *Shaykh al-Islām* “The Great Scholar of Islam”. Ibn Taymīyah’s critique and evaluation of Ibn

‘Arabī’s work is of significant importance in this study. Ibn Taymīyah’s critique is also considered one of the most scathing, yet influential critiques of Ibn ‘Arabī’s work. He wrote books and treatises with the sole purpose of rebutting Ibn ‘Arabī’s work, especially regarding his understanding of the story of Moses and Khidr. For example, his book entitled *The Criterion between Allies of the Merciful and the Allies of the Devil*, translated by Salim AbdAllāh ibn Morgan, is one of Ibn Taymīyah’s most well known works addressing Ibn ‘Arabī’s theology. It is of both interest and significance to this study that both Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn Taymīyah resided in Damascus, during the same era but at different times. This point and its relevance to the discussion will be explored in this study.

Considering the medieval Sūfī interpretation books, in fact, Sūfīs have authored many interpretative books using the indicator method; it is a synonym for the method of allusion (*ishāra*), the allegorical or esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān. However, three of their better-known works give a unique account of the story of Khidr and offer different perspectives. They are:

__Abū’l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Kārim b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d.1072)⁸, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, ed. Ibrahim Basyuni (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 1968 vol. 3). It has not been translated yet, but the story of Khidr is translated by Hugh Talat Halman in his book *Where the Two Seas Meet*. *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* is probably the most widely read summary of early Sūfism.

__Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. 1126)⁹ *Kashf al-asrār wa-‘uddat al-Abrār*, The Unveiling of the Mysteries and the Provision of the Pious. Translated by William C. Chittick. (2014) Vol.1. The

⁸ Al-Qushayrī was an Arab from Northeastern Iran who studied with al-Sulamī after his primary spiritual teacher and father-in-law, Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq” (Sands, 2006, p.71).

⁹ “We know very little of the life of Rashīd al-Dīn Ahmad Maybudī, from his name we know he was from Maybud, a small town near Yazd in central Iran. On the basis of the contents of his commentary, Rokni has concluded that al-Maybudī was a Shāfi‘ī Sunnī Ḥadīth scholar who showed his respect for the Shī‘ī tradition by quoting ‘Alī 185 times and other Shī‘ī imāms 68 times” (Sands, 2006, p.73).

book *Kashf al-asrār* has sometimes been called the *Tafsīr of Khwājā ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī* but, in fact, al-Anṣārī is only one of the sources al-Maybudī used in the third part of his *Tafsīr*.

_Al-Kāshānī (d. 1329) ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kamāl al-Dīn b. Abi’l-Ghanāim al-Kāshānī (or Qāshānī, Kāshī or Kāsānī). *Tafsīr al-Kāshānī, Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur’ān* (1982). Amman, Jordan press. Royal Aal al-bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. Part I Surahs 1-18. Al-Kāshānī studied logic and philosophy as a young man before turning to Sūfism, where his philosophical bent found new expression in the school of Ibn ‘Arabī. Al-Kāshānī became one of the most widely read early interpreters of Ibn ‘Arabī. This *Tafsīr* has been published several times in two large volumes inaccurately attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī (Sands, 2006, p.76).

For the current research, the significance of such books is their provision of valuable details concerning the relationship between the knowledge of Khidr and the Sūfī approach to the Qur’ān, as Sūfī exegetes have claimed that the first mention of such method of allusion (*ishāra*) is in the story of Moses and Khidr. They also provide insight into the relationship between the events that run between Moses and Khidr in the story and the Theory of Perfection. These issues will be explored and examined in Chapter 4.

Interestingly most of the other books of interpretations of the Qur’ān shed light on the story of Moses and Khidr when they are discussing the story, and some of them have disagreed and reply to Sūfī beliefs regarding this story, and some of them have agreed and engaged in these discussions. Some examples of these interpretations include al-Tustarī, (d.896), al-Qurṭubī (d.1272), Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī (d.1344) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373). Some of these books provide additional accounts of the relationship between the elements of story and the Sūfī understanding of the Khidr. For example, Ibn Kathīr provides additional knowledge on the nature of Khidr. These books provide additional accounts of the relationship between the elements of story and the Sūfī understanding of the Khidr. For example, Ibn Kathīr provides additional knowledge on the nature of Khidr.

In moving from books of interpretation to literature, Khidr is found across a variety of literary contexts. Medieval Sūfīs poets who frequently mentioned the figure of Khidr and his story's elements in their poems. This study will be centered upon three majors medieval Sūfī poets:

_Aṭṭār (d. 1222). Farīd al-dīn Aṭṭār is considered one of the three most important Sūfī Poet-Masters. He was the author of more than forty books of poetry and prose, including many powerful mystical poems. He is especially known for poetry love (*ghazal*). (Smith, 2012, p.82). The figure Khidr is frequently mentioned by Aṭṭār in his poems. This can be seen, for example, in his poem entitled “*Possessed by Madness for God*”, “*Mad for God*” for short; as well as in his poems entitled (*Ilāhī-Nāma*), translated by John Andrew Boyle (2011); *The Conference of the Birds* (Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr, 1984); and *Muslim saints and mystics: episodes from the Taḍkerat al-awliā'* (*Memorial of the saints*).

Aṭṭār attempts to explain through his poetry some of the ambiguous concepts related to Sūfīs in the medieval age, such as the right way for the disciples to get the truth, and the path of perfection. In his poem (*Possessed by Madness for God*), there is a philosophical conversation between Aṭṭār and Khidr. Aṭṭār asks Khidr to be his friend and companion, as Moses asked Khidr to follow him in the Qur'ānic story (Q 18:62). Aṭṭār says (Muhammad, 2012, p.109):

Oh, the perfect man! Would you like to be my companion?

You and me do not agree; as you have drunk a lot of the water of life/eternity,

So, you will live forever, but I wish to surrender my soul to God.

Rūmī (d. 1237). Jalāluddīn Muhammad Rūmī who was born in Balkh in Persia, but did not stay long in his home town, as he travelled with his family and settled in Turkey, where Rūmī met Aṭṭār. This meeting “had a deep impact on Rūmī's thoughts, which later on became the inspiration for his *Mathnawī*” (Smith, 2012, p.54). Rūmī has authored many books; however, one of his more

well-known works give a unique account of the figure of Khidr. This is *Mathnawi*, or *Mathnawī*, “Teachings of Rūmī”, translated and abridged by EH Whinfield.

The context of Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* collection is to explain the mystical approach to having a good relationship with God through poetry. This approach according to Rūmī helps the disciples who are searching for the truth (*ḥaqīqa*) (Mannani, 2010, pp.161-68). Rustom (, 2007, p.69) says that “*Mathnawī* has the couplets of inner Meaning, and countless metaphysical concepts are woven into the fabric of the text in order to elucidate important Sūfī teachings. Two concepts to which Rūmī devotes a good deal of attention are the heart and the spirit”. *Mathnawī* has about 26,000 verses divided into six books, all of which are considered “a spiritual writing that teaches Sūfīs how to reach their goal of being in true love with God” (Williams, 2006, p.34). One of these teachings is the story of Moses and Khidr, which comes in four poems:

- 1) The prophet’s Counsels to Ali to Follow the Direction of the Pir or Spiritual Guide, and to Endure his Chastisements Patiently
- 2) Ali, the Lion of God
- 3) The Man Whose Calling ‘O God’ Was Equivalent to God’s Answering Him ‘Here Am I’
- 4) Teachings on the Friend of God’s Relationship to law *sharī‘a*

These are the most important sources in this study. However, there are other important books which give a spatial account to the story of Khidr, and will be useful through all the chapters of the current study, they are:

The seal of the saints the Khatm al-awliyā’ (1999), by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī¹⁰, supplies valuable details about the doctrine of the seal of the saints, which is compared with the seal of the prophets.

¹⁰ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī al-Ḥanafī he died around (d. 900). “He was perfect in divine knowledge and an *imām* of his time. He enjoyed an eminent position amongst the Sheikhs of Sūfism. He composed many books which, by their eloquence, declare the miracles vouchsafed to him, e.g., the *Khatm al-awliyā’*. He is said to have been associated with the Khidr. His disciple, Abū Bakr Warrāq, relates that Khidr used to visit him every Sunday, and they used to converse with each other” (al-Hujwīrī, 1976, pp.166).

In fact, this belief first appeared in the work of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn 'Arabī followed al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in this belief. Ibn Taymīyah has critiqued al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's book, *the seal of the saints* (1999), as he made many mistakes in Ibn Taymīyah's opinion. One of which, according to Ibn Taymīyah, was to create the doctrine of the seal of the saints. This dispute is relevant to this study and it includes the relationship between the aforementioned doctrine and the identity of Khidr.

Another important book is *The Kitāb al-luma' fi'l- Taṣawwuf* by al-Sarrāj ¹¹. Al-Sarrāj focuses the attention of his famous Sūfī book on replying to those Sūfīs who subscribe to the claim of the superiority of saints over prophets, as they have understood from the story of Moses and Khidr. He has provided some evidence from the story itself and from the other Qur'ānic texts to prove that prophets are of a much higher status than saints. Not only this, but also the significance of this book is its provision of valuable details of the nature of the figure of Khidr.

Another book is *Kashf al-mahjūb* by Abu 'l-Ḥasan al-Hujwīrī, ¹² (1976) translated by RA Nicholson as *Kashf al-mahjūb* of al-Hujwīrī: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sūfism. It is a widely read Sūfī manual. For the current research, the significance of such books is their provision of valuable examples for the Sūfī saints who claimed to have had meetings with Khidr.

¹¹ Al-Sarrāj (d.988), "so far as we know, was the author of only one book, *The Kitāb al-luma' fi'l- Taṣawwuf*, a highly influential work which served both as a defense of Sūfism and a manual for its followers" (Sands, 2006, p.151). The Arabic text of *Kitāb al-luma'* is edited by R.A. Nicholson and followed by his abridged English translation. The *Kitāb al-luma'* has also been translated into German. By R. Gramlich as *Schlaglichter über das Sufitum*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990.

¹² Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Uthmān b. 'Alī al-Ghaznawī al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī (d.1077). "He was born in a noble family of Ghazna which was renowned for their piety and countenance. His lineage reaches to Ali through Hasan. He was a Sunnī Ḥanafī and in mystic way. In his novitiate days he widely traveled in most parts of the Islamic Empire and graced himself with the knowledge of mystic path" he authors many books an example is *The Kashf al-Mahjūb* (al-Hujwīrī, 1976, p.5).

Another an important book known as *al-ṣaḥar al-naḍār fī ḥāl Al-Khidr* was written by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d.1449), edited by Salah Ahmed (2004). The author of this book has discussed the issue of the prophecy of Khidr, and his immortality. He employed some previous books that discussed the figure of Khidr with a critical assessment of those texts. However, he mainly mirrors the structure of Ibn Taymīyahs’ critique of the Sūfis in the understanding of the figure of Khidr in his book, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

An important account in is the writings of the mystic ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī (d.1565). Al-Sha‘rānī has discussed the figure of Khidr in several of his different books. However, *al-mizan al-khidrīyya*, not yet translated into the English language, is the most attentive to subject. He mentioned in the introduction of his book that he asked God to give him the *mizan* to balance between the different views regarding jurisprudence *faqīh*. According to al-Sha‘rānī, God responded to his request and he had a meeting with Khidr, who gave him the special approach to balance between the views of the jurisprudence *fiqh*. The book provides general information about Khidr such as the immortality of Khidr, accounts of some of those who have had encounters with Khidr, and a description of Khidr’s character, his clothes, and food. In regard to the nature of Khidr al-Sha‘rānī believes that Khidr is in a position between saints and prophets, he has a sainthood side and a prophetic side.

1.2.3 Modern Literature

The aim of this part is to highlight the current/modern literature or debate on this topic, which includes Muslim scholars who are still a part of that debate and Western scholarship, which is engaged in a different debate. They all have different methodological approaches that will be useful throughout the study. There are, in fact, some useful modern materials connecting the story of Moses and the figure of Khidr, and most of these have already been written in or translated into English. Some scholars have discussed this subject; or rather, some of the issues involved in this subject. However, these works fail to provide a comprehensive study of the topic, as they do not

address the story directly in medieval Sūfism, but only refer to it. One of the more recent sources is, *Moses in the Qur'ān and Islamic Exegesis* by Brannon Wheeler, (2002). This book has four chapters, all of which discuss how Islamic and Western scholars read the story of Moses as found in the Qur'ān. Most of the discussion illustrates the relationship between the Qur'ān and the Bible. In Chapter 1, Brannon Wheeler discusses the story of Moses with the servant of God known as Khidr. The context of this chapter is to discuss the link between the story of Khidr and the story of Elijah on one hand and the legend of the Gilgamesh epic on the other hand. It is argued therein that the figure of Khidr was mainly understood by the Qur'ānic commenters and that these were attempts to discover a new interpretation of the figure of Khidr focusing on the key texts associated with Khidr. According to Wheeler despite the fact that there is an impact between the Qur'ānic commentator and other traditions, this has not impacted the production of the Qur'ān itself. He says that “to assume that the Qur'ān intended these associations would be to conflate the Qur'ān with its earliest interpreters and implicates a number of literary and theological perspectives not always made explicit by those who make the assumption” (p. 33).

Brannon Wheeler discusses some Western scholars such as Julian Obermann, Reuven Firestone, Jacob Lassner and Steven Wasserstrom, who have remarked on the parallels between the story of Khidr and the Alexander Romance, which is itself derived from the story of Gilgamesh and the story of Elijah. These, at the same time, are also perceived to be the three main sources of the story of Khidr, implying, as it were, to attempt to identify external sources for the Qur'ānic stories. For example, Wensinck, in his article *Al-Khadir (Al-Khidr)*, in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1960), has claimed that the story of Moses and Khidr is derived from Jewish legend; however, Wheeler disagrees and argues that the Jewish legend can be traced to Arabic sources. He states that the common narrative elements isolated by Wensinck and earlier scholars conflate the Qur'ānic version with material from later Qur'ānic commentaries (p.33). Wheeler argued that the story was not derived from Jewish sources; and he supports his argument by focusing on the story's elements,

such as “the Water of Life” that is connected to the figure of Khidr, which is also found in the legend of Gilgamesh epic and the Alexander romance. Wheeler debated that this element (the water of Life) is not mentioned explicitly in the text of the Qur’ān, but it is mentioned only in the commentaries of the Qur’ān. In other words, according to Wheeler there is, in fact, a misunderstanding and confusion between the text of the Qur’ān and its exegesis, which is considered, according to Wheeler, as the main point that is used to link the story of Khidr with the story of Alexander. An important point here is that Wheeler has referred especially in this regard to the twelfth-century exegesis. Wheeler “stresses the wide variety of interpretations given to this passage in early exegesis (and suggests a possible linguistic connection with the primordial fish upon which God created the earth), but points out that these gradually gave way to an emphasis on links with the Alexander episode such that, ‘by the twelfth century ... exegetes understood Q 18:60-82 to be an allusion to the Alexander stories” (p. 15). This may indicate the Sūfī interpretation of the Qur’ān, which has commonly employed such elements in their interpretation books. Sands (2006, p. 82) says that “Khidr’s immortality is often mentioned in Sūfī works, especially in his role as a spiritual initiator”. As a result, “Wheeler views the appropriation of themes from earlier sources as part of a purposeful interpretative strategy for uncovering meaning rather than as an attempt to “get the story straight” (2006, p. 80). This means that Western scholars according to Wheeler should be distinguishing between the Qur’ānic text and the commentators of the Qur’ān. In other words, the Qur’ānic commentators “used allusions to the motifs and materials of the Alexander Romance and Gilgamesh Epic not as a form of source criticism, but rather, as a strategy for positioning the authority of the commentators’ expertise and advancing an intertextuality that informs and exalts the status of the Prophet Muḥammad” (Wheeler, 2002, p. 24 & Halman, 2013, p. 75). Wheeler has illustrated the reason why Muslim exegetes have borrowed such stories from other traditions to explain the text of the Qur’ān; it is “to differentiate the message of the Qur’ān from that of the biblical narrative. The appropriation of stories associated with Alexander displays

this intent” (Wheeler, 2002, p. 25). Despite that, the similarities may not be enough to link the story of Khidr with the epic of Gilgamesh as “how the lost text of Gilgamesh could even have served as a reference for Qur’ānic revelation remains unanswerable” (Wheeler, 2002, p. 25).

In view of the preceding discussion, we may conclude the following: Wheeler’s work might have been potentially relevant for my discussion of the story of Moses and Khidr, as the first chapter of Wheeler’s book focuses entirely on the story of Khidr 18:60-82, it does not, however, concern the Sūfī understanding of Khidr. Nevertheless, Wheeler’s contribution in this regard, namely that the commentators should reconsider some of the alleged sources used to understand the story of Moses and Khidr, is very important point and relevant in this study, and will be discussed as there are many tales and transmitted reports about Khidr which are employed by Sūfis to understand the figure of Khidr. For that reason, there is a special chapter in this thesis, which will concentrate on Sūfī sources for understanding the figure of Khidr in order to examine this important point.

However, there is another voice engaged in this debate, Kristin Zahra Sands in her more relevant book *Sūfī Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam* (2006). Sands (2006, p. 80) admits that the water of life is not mentioned explicitly in the text of the Qur’ān as Wheeler claimed, but he argued that Wheeler does not consider that the commentators of the Qur’ān attributed certain details (e.g., the water of life and the fish that came to life) to the Ḥadīth text. Sands in this regard refers to the Ḥadīth narrated by Ubayy b. Ka’b. This point and its relevance to the discussion will be also explored in Chapter 2. The existence or lack of existence of “apocryphal accretions to the Qur’ānic narratives of Moses and Khidr” (Wheeler, 2002, p. 25) will be discussed in this regard. Sands has briefly discussed this point in her book, as the purpose of this book is to demonstrate and analyze the classical Sūfī method of the Qur’ān and distinguish between the two. The author also provides the interpretation of some parts of the story of Khidr itself as a sample focusing on the relationship between the story of Moses and Khidr and the Sūfī method of interpreting the Qur’ān on one hand and its relationship to the theory of attaining perfection on the other hand. She

attempts to compare between two medieval Sūfī commentators on the Qur’ān, Maybudī and al-Kāshānī, in the interpretation methods of their books. The author has noted that there is a relationship between the terminology and concepts used to explain this theory and the writing of Ibn Sina (d. 1037) (Avicenna). She concludes her comparison by saying that: “.... Also distinctive is the way in which he combines the terminology and concepts taken from the writings of Ibn Sina with those of the Sūfīs” (2006, p. 91). This is unlike medieval Sūfīs, including Maybudī and al-Kāshānī, who have tried to connect this theory to the story of Khidr. However, Sands argues that “Sūfī commentators’ intellectual dispositions and temperaments did not hinder their expositions of the inner meanings of the Qur’ān, but actually enhanced them. Sūfīs such as al-Kāshānī were able to explain the esoteric symbolism of the significance of the story of Moses and Khidr for example with respect to their own highly developed mystical anthropologies and cosmologies. Yet Sūfī commentators belonging to different intellectual and spiritual persuasions, such as Maybudī, were no less profound in their different explanations of the same verses of the Qur’ān” (p. 27).

Sands’ discussion in this regard may be helpful for understanding the nature of Sūfī interpretations, which we will build upon in approaching the nature of Sūfī interpretation and its relationship to the story of Khidr. However, the discussion will be extended to clarify the definition of Sūfī interpretation, its historical context, and its relationship with the Qur’ānic story of Moses and Khidr. To fully understand the methods of medieval Sūfī interpretation on the one hand, and its relationship to the Qur’ānic story of Khidr on the other hand, will examine three significant medieval Sūfī interpretations. The discussion in this regard will be extended to include al-Qushayrī, along with Maybudī and al-Kāshānī.

The popularity of Khidr in religious literature has made him the subject of discussion in several studies in terms of his identity and origin. This is based upon whether he is a prophet, or a saint passed away or still alive. In fact, this debate goes back to earlier times: Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258) for example, supported the opinion that Khidr is still alive by saying that “there

are two things I hate that the jurists do: they assert that Khidr is dead and they call Mansur al-Hallāj infidel” (Kocaer, 2015, p. 91). As this statement indicates, the debate about the nature of Khidr and his immortality had already been an issue under discussion among the scholars in the early thirteenth century. This suggests that there was a common debate that goes back to earlier periods of Islamic history. Modern studies have also engaged in some parts of these debates. One of these works is *Prophets in the Qur’ān: An Introduction to the Qur’ān and Muslim Exegesis: Stories of the prophets* (2002) by Brannon Wheeler. In this book Wheeler provides some more details about the figure of Khidr especially his identity, the genealogy of Khidr, whether he is a prophet or a saint, and he explores whether he is still alive, or has he passed away. The book also provides different narrations and views in this regard, and he supports the view of al-Tabarī that Khidr lived before the Prophet Moses which is according to him is "closer to the truth" (p. 225). Otherwise, he does not refer to Sūfī opinions in this regard only he argued that Khidr is a "saint to many Sūfī" (p. 225). In addition, he refers also to the dispute between scholars regarding to the identity of the figure Moses as the companion of Khidr. As there are two different opinions, some argued that he was not Moses the Prophet who was sent with the Torah, but another Moses who was a prophet before the Prophet Moses who was sent with the Torah, another holds the opinion that he is the Prophet Moses who sent with the Torah. However, Brannon Wheeler leaves this argument unexplored, which will be extended and widely discussed in this study in chapter two.

There are also some Modern Arabic commentaries on Khidr that are interesting texts pertinent to this study, and which consider Khidr’s identity and origin. Some of them support Sūfī beliefs in the understanding of Khidr and others have challenged their beliefs¹³. An important book in this regard is *Khidr and his effects between the truth and myth*, by Ahmed Abdul al-Azīz al-Hussain (1986). This book has provided general information about the figure of Khidr, in regard to how the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth texts presented the story of Khidr, focusing on the nature of Khidr, whether

¹³ It should be noted that all the texts used and quoted from these books are translated by the researcher.

he is a prophet or a saint, and whether he is still alive or has he passed away. The author makes passing mention of the available evidence in this issue, which includes Sūfī views of the nature of Khidr; however, he did not discuss their views and claimed that they are simply ignorant. This is unlike what Jawdat Muhammad al-Mahdi has understood in his book *Mystical Aspects of the Story of Moses and Khidr* (1987). The author has attempted to explain as he claimed the ‘truth of Sūfism’. He argued that Khidr is a saint and still alive, and he mentioned many more views to support this opinion. The author then moves to explain the Sūfī aspects of the story, such as the master disciple-relationship and the knowledge of Khidr and its relationship to the saints. He then presents Sūfī views on the type and the nature of such knowledge. The author concludes his discussion by evaluating the Sūfī views in this regard, by saying that they should not contradict the external and literal aspect of the knowledge, contrary to what some Sūfīs believe, who have not given attention to this important matter and its relationship with the knowledge of Khidr. This contribution is important and will be extended in this work to answer the questions of how Sūfī interpretations read the story of Moses and Khidr, and whether they contradict the conventional and literal meaning of the Qur’ān and do not pay attention to its context and literal meaning, as well as the question of how this is related to the knowledge of both Moses and Khidr?

There are several other books in this regard that discuss the story of Moses and Khidr, for example *al-Haḍhr Min al-qāwl bi- ḥayāt al-Khidr* by Mohammed Ibrahim Al-Luhaidan (1992), *Majlis al-Khidr* by Fatima Ali Jaafar (2007), *The Life of Khidr* by Mahmoud al-Shibli (n.d), and *The Story of Khidr* by Samin El-Din Bastami (n.d). These books give the most attention to discussing the nature of Khidr, whether he is still alive, or has he passed away, and was he a prophet, a saint or an angel. In some of these works Khidr is seen as a prophet, and in other works he is seen as "a multi-faceted and ubiquitous figure who appears in different roles and whose identity has been shaped and developed in relation to the interaction of societies via conversion, migration and translation activities" (Kocaer, 2015, p. 100). However, this work will shine a new light on these

debates by focusing on Sūfī meetings with Khidr and thorough examination of his identity in cultural and folkloric practices.

A new belief is created by Sūfīs according to the relationship between Khidr and Moses in their story, which has been taken as a model and an example to demonstrate the master-disciple relationship in medieval Sūfī belief. There are, in fact, books and articles which paid attention to this belief and its relationship to the story of Khidr. One of these works that can be regarded for the present study as a valuable source is Sara Sviri in her book *The Taste of Hidden Things: Images of the Sūfī Path* (1997). The author of this book has discussed the story of Khidr in a chapter entitled *Where the two seas meet: the story of Khidr*. In this chapter, Sara Sviri considers the relationship between Moses and Khidr and the master-disciple relationship. Sviri "uses the Khidr story to describe the teacher relationship based on her own experience and as she applies it to the case of the contemporary Naqshbandi teacher Irina Tweedie" (Sviri, 1997, p. 35). In Khidr, Sviri finds the paradoxical qualities of the teacher as both "a merciful, nourishing benefactor" and a "ruthless, uncompromising demolisher of habits and thought forms" (p. 36). She describes the teacher as both "undertaker and midwife" (p. 33); "a reviver of dead souls and the destroyer of illusions" (p. 35); "like a finely-tuned compass, [which] always points to the 'mystical north' " (p. 35); "a black hole... a door to the beyond." (p. 35). These descriptions, however, do not relate to Sūfī understanding of the master-disciple relationship, which is already widely discussed and considered by another scholar in his book *Where the Two Seas Meet: The Qur'ānic Story of Khidr and Moses in Sūfī commentaries as a model for Spiritual Guidance* (2013) by Hugh Talat Halman. This book was a dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Religion in the Graduate School of Duke University (2000).

This study focuses on examining the relationship between the story of Khidr and Moses and the mentoring relationship of spiritual guidance as that relationship appears in Sūfī *tafsīr*. According

to the author the figure of Khidr “plays a distinctive role in Sūfī exegesis. He has served as both an example and counterexample — sometimes justifying and sometimes challenging — the role of the mentor in the spiritual training of disciples (*murids*)”. This work calls for attention to the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth text and *tafsīr*. This is through answering the question of “How have Sūfī thinkers applied this story of Moses and Khidr to illuminating the relationship between spiritual guide (*murshid*) and disciple (*murīd*)?” In order to answer this question, the author has provided comparative analysis of the story of Moses and Khidr by three prominent medieval Sūfī commentators. They are al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1309) and ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, (d. 1329). The themes that are covered during the comparison are the relationship between the story of Moses and Khidr and the master-disciple relationship as well as a juxtaposition focusing on the story and Ernest Becker’s theory of the denial of death. Brannon Wheeler points out that “Halman includes an overview of the Khidr–Moses relationship as a model for the master-disciple relationship in Sūfism and provides brief but suggestive references to the almost parallel significance of Khidr in Voltaire and Carl Jung” (Wheeler, 2016, pp. 649-50). The author engaged some modern literature in the discussion but confined it mostly to footnotes. However, this book provides the first translation of al-Qushayrī’s interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr into English and he provides his own analyses and explanation. In fact, Halman’s study reveals, while the early Qur’ān interpreters, such as al-Tabarī (d.923), do not refer to any similarity between the master-disciple relationship and the Qur’ānic story in his works, along with the formation and development of Sūfī orders, the relationship between Moses and Khidr becomes an integral part of the commentaries on the Qur’ān in order to exemplify the rules of the master-disciple relationship. In fact, during the classical period this belief was not yet known. Perhaps according to Halman “the identification of Khidr as an exemplary teacher may have become established prior to classical Sūfism, but it is most fully developed in the medieval age” (p. 21). However, Halman adds that, there are some motifs in the Ḥadīth text that can be taken as indicators

of the master-disciple relationship. These motifs will be discussed and analyzed to explore a number of important questions about the nature of the relationship between the story of Moses and Khidr on one hand, and the master-disciple relationship on the other hand, and how scholars deal with this belief. Not only this but will move beyond to see how this belief has impacted on medieval Sūfī literature.

There is, in fact, another important book that discussed the belief of the master-disciple relationship. This book is *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (2013) by Henry Corbin who has “dwelt on the similarities between Ibn ‘Arabi’s encounters with Khidr and the tradition of Sūfis whose spiritual guides are deceased and not physically present, we turn to consider this comparison and its relevance, plausibility, and fidelity” (Halman, 2013, p. 248). The author has examined the role of the figure of Khidr as a teacher in Sūfī thought focusing on Ibn ‘Arabī as a master of Khidr, especially Ibn ‘Arabī’s meetings with Khidr. This is through the using of “concepts from both Sūfism and Jungian analytical psychology to analyse the spiritual experience that he believes represents the act of recognizing oneself as a disciple of Khidr. He views Khidr as both a person and an archetype who leads each of his disciples throughout the ages” (Sands 2006, p. 162). According to Henry Corbin based on the encounters of Ibn ‘Arabī with Khidr, some scholars attributed a significant role to Khidr in Ibn ‘Arabī’s training. Henry Corbin claims that “this suggests what it means to be the disciple of Khidr” (p. 355) and he talks about Ibn ‘Arabī as “above all the disciple of Khidr” (p. 356). Claude Addas however, opposes Corbin by arguing that, Ibn ‘Arabī claims Jesus as “his real, first teacher” (Morris, 1987, p. 637). Stephen Hirtenstein on the other hand, following Corbin’s opinion, claims that the *khirqā* is a symbol for the initiation of Ibn ‘Arabī into Khidr’s realm and he argues that it also symbolizes becoming Khidr “this ceremony identifies the recipient with the spiritual state of Khidr, so that he not only meets Khidr in person but in some sense actually becomes or represents him” (Hirtenstein, 1999, p. 190). However, this is unlike what Ian Richard Netton has understood in his more relevant article *Theophany as*

Paradox: Ibn ‘Arabī’s account of Khidr in his Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam (1992). In fact, Sūfīs have taken the story of Moses and Khidr as a model to illustrate the master-disciple relationship. Ian Richard Netton focuses his attention on clarifying Ibn ‘Arabī’s interpretation of Moses and Khidr’s relationship in their story. He argued that the relationship, like “mutual agreement,” rather than failure on Moses’ part, should be construed to mean that while Khidr is the “Supreme Master,” Khidr and Moses were not engaged in a master-disciple relationship. “There is no Master/Pupil relationship here in Ibn ‘Arabī’s text in which Khidr is the Supreme Master” (Halman, 2013, p. 6). Netton’s point of view of 'mutuality' is "only one aspect of Ibn ‘Arabī’s treatment of the relationship and the separation. An alternative reading of Ibn ‘Arabī’s discussion suggests that Khidr defers to Moses’s status as apostle, out of respect for Moses’s office, not as an endorsement of Moses’s decision to affect their separation" (Halman, 2013, p. 6). However, despite that these works are very important to the current study, their accounts raise some questions, and especially the question of how we can evaluate the case of the Prophet Moses who was failed according to this belief. This debate is relevant in this current study, as there will be a section allocated to answer this and other questions by analyzing three medieval Sūfī interpretations, and the discussion will be extended to include Maybudī and will also explore how modern scholars deal with this belief, not only this but will also move beyond to see how this belief has impacted on medieval Sūfī literature.

In fact, the Moses Khidr relationship in the story does not only demonstrate the master-disciple relationship but also moves beyond to highlight the relationship between prophethood and sainthood, as Moses who is a Prophet sent to Khidr who is a saint in order to learn from him. There are some studies concerned with this relationship: one of the most important is *prophethood and sainthood in the doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī* (1993). It was written by Michel Chodkiewicz in the French language, and later translated to both Arabic, by Ahmed El Tayeb, and English, by Liadain Sherrard. It is probably the most important book which discusses sainthood in the account of Ibn

‘Arabī. Chodkiewicz begins the book with “a brief survey of the history of Ibn ‘Arabī studies in Western scholarship and then devotes a good deal of time to discussing the idea of sainthood in Islam before Ibn ‘Arabī. Here he shows how devotion to the saints in classical Islam was not simply a manifestation of popular piety. On the contrary, it seems to have been a natural consequence of Islamic practice" (Rustom, 2009, p. 1). Chodkiewicz has provided in this excellent exposition a historical context of the doctrine of *walāya* starting with al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 900), who is considered the first to discuss this belief, and Ibn ‘Arabī who is also considered the first to fully develop this belief. The author explains many more ideas about this belief in the account of Ibn ‘Arabī. He focuses his attention to explore “how thinkers in the later Islamic tradition responded to his notion of the seal of Muḥammad saints, as well as the severe criticisms leveled against Ibn ‘Arabī and members of his school by the likes of Ibn Taymīyah" (Rustom, 2009, p. 1). Such scholars argued that Ibn ‘Arabī has claimed that saints could be of a higher rank than prophets. According to them, this can be understood from the relationship between Moses and Khidr in the story. The author has replied on this claim and concluded that there is a misunderstanding of Ibn ‘Arabī’s account regarding the relationship between prophets and saints, especially belief in the superiority of saints over prophets, which according to Chodkiewicz does not exist in Ibn ‘Arabī’s account. Despite that, Chodkiewicz’s analysis of the words and phrases employed for the explanation of this belief is useful in understanding how other scholars deal with it, however, my discussion and analysis will focus on the possibility of the belief of the superiority of saints over prophets and its relationship to the story of Moses and Khidr, which is not addressed by the author, as according to those who have severe criticisms leveled against Ibn ‘Arabī have claimed that this belief can be understood from the relationship between Moses and Khidr in their story. Therefore, my discussion will focus on this point and will go through different stages starting with the mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 900), who is considered the first to have established or introduced the theory of the seal of the saints *walāya* as a doctrine to Sūfis in his book *Khatm al-*

awliyā', *the seal of the saints* (1999). The discussion moves on to identify how Sūfīs after al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī deal with this belief, and how it relates to the story of Khidr. This study also discusses how modern scholars have evaluated the discussion about this belief, for example, the recent scholarship of Diego Sarrio Cucarella who has supported Chodkiewicz' arguments in his article *Spiritual anti-elitism: Ibn Taymīyah's doctrine of sainthood (walāya)* (2011). The article has analyzed and evaluated some of the aspects of the debates about Khidr between Ibn Taymīyah and other Sūfīs, focusing on the concept of *walāya* sainthood or friendship with God, the author provides a book review of Ibn Taymīyah's book *al-furqān bayna awliyā' al-Raḥmān wa-awliyā' al-Shayṭān, The criterion [for distinguishing] between the friends of the All Merciful and the friends of Satan*. Some of the main issues addressed in this article are the relationship between prophethood and sainthood, the qualities of the saints, and the seal of the saints. The author disagrees with Ibn Taymīyah and argued that there is no relationship between the seal of the saints and the seal of the prophets. However, he admits that "Ibn Taymīyah did not reject the Sūfī tradition wholesale, but tried to bring it within the strict limits of Islamic orthodoxy as he understood it. More specifically, Ibn Taymīyah sought to defend an ideal of *walāya* within the reach of ordinary Muslims, against what he perceived as the elitism of certain Sūfī views of sanctity and the extravagant behavior of marginal holy men" (p.1). This article is useful in evaluating the discussion between Ibn Taymīyah and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, and the study will shed a new light on this debate.

This study will provide a novel exploration of the effect of the figure of Khidr in medieval Sūfī literature. Despite this, there are some studies that consider aspects of Khidr in Sūfī literature. An example is Sara Sviri who has a useful article, which is *The Obsession with Life: Jung, Khidr and the Sūfī Tradition* (2001). She provides in this essay an evaluation and analysis of some poetry related to Khidr in the account of Aṭṭār in his epic of *Conference of the Birds (Manṭiq-ut-Ṭayr)*. She made such a comparison between the philosophy and Sūfīs in terms of their terminology. Sviri

argued that “In our own times one thinks of the search of the philosopher Martin Heidegger, in the tradition of Phenomenology, for the essence of Being, a search which made him utter statements such as, "Being is veiled by beings." In Sūfī terms, this "stupor" in face of truth itself, das Ding als sich, when it results in the withdrawal of ego consciousness, is called 'annihilation' (*fana'*)" (p.4). In this article the author “follow the thread of that strange, but well documented, mystic drive for the ultimate state that is described as nothingness, darkness, poverty and death" (p.4). The author finally turns her attention to the relationship between these concepts and the figure of Khidr, she argued that “what has all this to do with the vital, effervescent and everpresent figure of Khidr, the Green Man of the Sūfī tradition who heralds mystical knowledge, life, growth and change?" (p.4). In fact, these contradictions can be understood from her analysis of *The Conference of the Birds*, a mystical epic by the 12th-century poet Farīd al-Dīn Attār. However, further exploration of these issues is still required, by re-examining the full epic in the light of additional details, as will be discussed in Chapter Five. There is another important article in this regard by Coomaraswamy Ananda, *Khwājā Khidr and the Fountain of Life in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art* (1934). The essay focuses on the nature and the characteristics of Khidr in international literature. For example, “In India, the prophet, saint, or Deity known as *Khwājā Khizr* (Khadir), Pir Badar, or Raja Kidar, is the object of a still surviving popular cult, common to Muslims and Hindus" (p.1). The author also evaluated some interesting folktales about Khidr and comments in other stories, which will be useful for Chapter 5.

There are also some useful articles about Khidr in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), and *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), which cover different aspect for the present study and provide useful information about Khidr. For example, under *al-Khadir* in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, by A.J. Wensinck, the author has traced back the legend of Khidr to three common legends: the epic of Gilgamesh, the Alexander romance, and the Jewish legend of the Prophet Elijah. However, the

author has left the discussion about Khidr in the medieval Age unexplored. Another article which discusses the meaning of the term *kashf in Sūfism* is L. Gardet's article *Kashf* in the Encyclopedia of Islam. Some other useful articles found in *the Encyclopedia of Islam* include *Khidr* by Israel Friedlander, Wensinck's *al-Khadir (al-Khidr)*, and *Khadir-Ilyas* by H.A.R. Gibb. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* contains another useful article under *Khidr*. All of these articles are very useful in terms of discussing the person of Khidr, and his nature.

1.2.5 Conclusion

Considerable literature exists in this current study, written in different languages and faiths, in particular, pertaining to the medieval Sūfī understanding of the figure Khidr. This chapter's aim was to outline the sources that will be mentioned, and why they are used in this analysis. This is achieved by dividing them into two types: classical and medieval sources and modern sources. The classical and medieval sources are further divided into two categories. The first category includes religious sources (Qur'ān and Ḥadīth), which, according to Islamic belief, are considered two of the main sources for understanding Qur'ānic stories including the story of Moses and Khidr. These are the classical sources. While these sources provide valuable details about Khidr, there is a lack of information relevant to the issues at hand about Khidr within these sources. One important issue is the identity and the nature of Khidr, for example, whether he is still alive or has he passed away, a prophet or a saint.

The second category of classical and medieval source is the medieval Sūfī sources, which present valuable details regarding the understanding of Khidr, their belief that Khidr is still alive, their having meetings with him, in addition to his giving them advice, answering their questions, and protecting them. Several medieval Sūfī sources present significant information about Khidr. There are also some Sunni sources that presented some useful information about Khidr mainly in replying to Sūfī beliefs in the understanding of the story of Moses and Khidr. As a result, there is a

considerable debate within the classical and medieval sources about the understanding of the story of Moses and Khidr, which will be explored and examined in this current study.

There are also a number of modern sources that are available, which discuss issues related to the story of Moses and Khidr. A noticeable feature of modern sources is that most of the Western scholars focus their attention on the link between the story of Khidr and the story of Elijah on one hand and the legend of Gilgamesh epic on the other hand. The possible explanation behind this is that to attempt to identify external sources for interpreting the Qur'ān, especially concerning the Qur'ānic stories.

There are also a number of books that are written in the Arabic language concerning the story. However, in this group of books, most attention is paid to discussing the nature of Khidr, whether he is still alive or has he passed away, and was he a prophet or a saint. However, little interest is paid to other topics related to the understanding of the story in accordance to medieval Sūfī belief. This group does not include information on key themes of the understanding the figure of Khidr by medieval Sūfis. More clearly, the main aim of this research, Khidr in medieval Sūfī belief, is not the focus of any previous studies.

Chapter 2: Sources for Sūfī Understanding of the Figure of Khidr: The Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, and Narratives and Tales about Khidr

Introduction:

In order to review the development around the narrative of the story of Moses and Khidr, first the chapter shall review the Qur’ānic text which is the core narrative of the figure of Khidr. Then we will integrate the Ḥadīth text which is considered the first commentary on the story, to see what makes Khidr important. After establishing this context, the chapter will consider the evolution of the development of the role of Khidr in a variety of Sūfī narratives and tales about Khidr. Throughout this, we will see how Sūfīs have developed the figure of Khidr from a teacher to someone still alive and then have a meeting with him, and what types of knowledge and mystical states are produced by this meeting.

2.1 The Qur’ān and Ḥadīth

This part attempts to answer the question of how do the narratives of both the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth as original sources introduce the figure of Khidr. This section consists of two parts, the first part deals with Khidr in the Qur’ānic text, and the second part deals with Khidr in the Ḥadīth accounts.

2.1.1 Khidr in the Qur’ān

According to Islamic beliefs, there were many types of revelation sent down to the Prophet Muḥammad, and these are divided into sections and chapters in the Qur’ān. Some of them embody the teachings of belief and conduct, while others lend themselves to moral directives, legal prescriptions, exhortations, and admonitions. In addition, there are themes found in the Qur’ān involving religious history or allusions to anecdotes from the past. For example, there are several accounts of historical Jewish and Christian prophets and their nations (for instance, Q 17:104 and Q 59:2). Furthermore, references to unknown prophets are also found in the Qur’ān (for instance, Q 18:60; Q 18:82):

We have sent other messengers before you– some We have mentioned to you and some We have not (Q 40:78).

Interestingly, the Qur’ān mentions that the aim of such stories is to inspire faith and steadfastness among the fledgling Muslim community in the commands of God (Q 12:111): “There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand. This revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it; an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe”. The Qur’ān also says: “Have they not travelled through the land and seen how those who lived before them met their end?” (Q 40:82).

There are also some stories narrated in the Qur’ān with relatively ambiguous details, such as the story of the Prophet Moses and Khidr, who is known as the Servant of God in the Qur’ān. Their story can be understood in the Qur’ān through focusing on two stages:

- 1) The background to the story of Moses and Khidr.
- 2) The Qur’ānic narrative of Moses and Khidr (Q18:60-82).

2.1.2 The Background to the Story of Moses and Khidr in the Qur’ān

Moses is considered a prophet, messenger, lawgiver, and leader in Islam. He is described in the Qur’ān (Q 33:7 and Q 46:35) as one of the five most prominent prophets in Islam, along with Abraham, Noah, Jesus, and Muḥammad; they are the prophets who are favoured by God and described as being endowed with determination and perseverance. The Qur’ān says: “We took a solemn pledge from the prophets– from you [Muḥammad], from Noah, from Abraham, from Moses, from Jesus, son of Mary – We took a solemn pledge from all of them” (Q 33:7), and “Be steadfast [Muḥammad], like those messengers of firm resolve” (Q 46:35).

Furthermore, the Prophet Moses and his story are recounted more than any other prophet in the Qur’ān; he is mentioned by name 136 times in thirty-four different chapters. Some of the verses talk about his message to Pharaoh, while others talk about his message to the Israelite community.

The final act in which Moses is mentioned in the Qur'ān is that of Moses seeking "the Servant of God". This final act is mentioned in verses Q 18:60-82 and it involves the primary subject of this thesis.

The story of Moses and Khidr has a great deal of importance; it has been considered to be a morally ambiguous event that happened to the Prophet Moses during his journey to Israel. The story takes place when the Prophet Moses is asked by God to look for the Servant of God, in order to gain knowledge from him. Many questions have been asked in order to understand the nature of the Servant of God; the reason for this is that the Qur'ān has no details concerning this Servant of God, who played such an important role in the events of the story. However, the Qur'ān does describe him as a wise, knowledgeable and merciful person (Q18:65).

2.1.3 The Qur'ānic Narrative of Moses and Khidr

The story of Khidr and Moses is a short story; it is mentioned in the Qur'ān once only, which is unusual when compared to the other events in the story of Moses in the Qur'ān, which are repeated many times. The story is in the eighteenth chapter of the Qur'ān, which locates it in the middle of the Qur'ān, and the story itself is located in the middle of this chapter. It is 22 verses, and is told as follows:

60 Moses said to his servant, 'I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years!' 61 but when they reached the place where the two seas meet, they had forgotten all about their fish, which made its way into the sea and swam away. 62 They journeyed on, and then Moses said to his servant, 'Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring,' 63 and [the servant] said, 'Remember when we were resting by the rock? I forgot the fish—Satan made me forget to pay attention to it— and it [must have] made its way into the sea.' 'How strange!' 64 Moses said, 'Then that was the place we were looking for.' So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps, 65 and found one of Our servants— a man to

whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own. 66 Moses said to him, ‘May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?’ 67 The man said, ‘You will not be able to bear with me patiently. 68 How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?’ 69 Moses said, ‘God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way.’ 70 The man said, ‘If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself.’ 71 They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, Moses said, ‘How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!’ 72 He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ 73 Moses said, ‘Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you.’ 74 And so they travelled on. Then, when they met a young boy and the man killed him, Moses said, ‘How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!’ 75 He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ 76 Moses said, ‘From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me from your company—you have put up with enough from me.’ 77 And so they travelled on. Then, when they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down and the man repaired it. Moses said, ‘But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that.’ 78 He said, ‘This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently: 79 the boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force. 80 The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief, 81 we wished that their Lord should give them another child— purer and more compassionate— in his place. 82 The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them.

Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.

In conclusion, it can be understood from the text of the Qur'ān that the story concerns the Prophet Moses and the Servant of God (Khidr). The Qur'ān has no definition of the 'Servant of God'. Nevertheless, the Qur'ān has described him as a wise, knowledgeable and merciful person, which opens a way for reflection on the nature of Khidr, especially his knowledge. It can be also understood that there are three main events that occur during the meeting between Moses and Khidr, each of which Moses finds objectionable and questions Khidr about. This is because Moses cannot understand Khidr's knowledge and the reasons behind his actions, which Khidr then explains later to Moses. According to the text of the Qur'ān, Khidr was not acting of his own accord, which means he was following God's instructions.

This is the extent of the narrative provided by the Qur'ān. However, the text of the Ḥadīth provides many more details about the story and shall be presented in the next section.

2.1.2 Khidr in the Ḥadīth

From an Islamic perspective, Ḥadīth “narrations of Prophet Muḥammad's sayings and actions” are considered the second source of understanding of the Islamic religion, this includes understanding the Qur'ānic story of Khidr. Therefore, this section deals with Khidr in the Ḥadīth texts, which focuses as mentioned in the literature review on the collections of both al-Bukhārī (d.870) and Muslim (d. 875).

There will be six stages covered in this section:

- 1) The reasons behind Moses' journey.
- 2) The events that happened in the story.
- 3) An analysis of the dialogue between Moses and Khidr in the story.

- 4) The evaluation of both Moses and Khidr by Prophet Muḥammad.
- 5) The interpretation of the events that happened in the story.
- 6) The person of the 'Servant of God' (Khidr) and the time period of the story.

2.2.1 The Reasons behind Moses' Journey

Most of the Ḥadīth that clarify the story of Moses and Khidr start with the identity of Moses, who accompanied Khidr in the Qur'ānic story (Q 18:60). According to al-Bukhārī and Muslim, Ibn 'Abbās related two different views with regard to the identity of the figure Moses as the companion of Khidr. The first view, which is supported by Ibn 'Abbās himself, is that the companion of Khidr is the Prophet Moses who was sent with the Torah. The second opinion was raised by Nawf al-Bikali (d. 693), who claims that the Moses who was the companion of Khidr was not Moses the Prophet, but another Moses, Moses bin Menasha Ben Youssef Ben Jacob, who was a prophet before the prophet Moses who was sent with the Torah. Sa'id Ibn Jubayr reported that:

I said to Ibn 'Abbās, "Nawf al-Bikali claims that Moses, the companion of Khidr, was not Moses [the Prophet] of the children of Israel, but some other Moses." Ibn 'Abbās said: "God's enemy [i.e. Nawf] has told a lie" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 55, Ḥadīth 613).

As can be seen, Ibn 'Abbās rejected this view and supported his opinion by saying it was narrated by Ubayy b. Ka'b that he heard God's messenger saying:

Once Moses stood up and addressed the people of Israel. He was asked who the most learned man amongst the people was. He said: "I." God admonished him as he did not attribute absolute knowledge to Him (God). So, God said to him: "Yes, at the junction of the two seas there is a slave of Mine who is more learned than you" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 55, Ḥadīth 613).

According to the Ḥadīth that the companion of Khidr in the story was the Prophet Moses who was, according to the text of the Qur'ān, sent to the Sons of Israel. However, the view of Nawf al-Bikali

might be due to two reasons. The first is that the story of Moses and Khidr is not mentioned at all in the Jewish scriptures, which might be important because if this story had happened to the Prophet Moses, it should have been mentioned in the Jewish scriptures. However, if this story happened to the Prophet Moses, but is not mentioned in the Torah, it maybe indicates that there is no direct relationship between this story and the Sons of Israel. The second reason is that the Prophet Moses is considered one of the greatest Prophets and messengers in the Qur'ān, who spoke directly with God (Q 4:164).

In addition, there are reasons and justifications behind Moses' (the prophet who was sent with the Torah) journey to learn from Khidr, which were mentioned in the above Ḥadīth. For those reasons, Moses was sent by God in order to learn from Khidr. This is a type of training (*ta'dīb*). This strengthens the idea that there could be no inconsistency between their knowledge, especially the knowledge that Moses learned from Khidr, which was not related to Moses' message or prophecy. Furthermore, we should not forget the fact that the Prophet Moses is mentioned 136 times in the Qur'ān, so if any other Moses were to be mentioned, the Qur'ān is likely to have mentioned the difference between them, to avoid confusion, ambiguity, and misunderstanding. Therefore, the Moses who is mentioned with Khidr in the Qur'ān is the Prophet Moses who was sent to the sons of Israel with the Torah, an opinion that is also supported by al-Ṭabarī (1959, p.293).

Because of this, and according to the text of both the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, Moses decided to look patiently for Khidr in order to learn from him: (Q 18:60). Sūfīs also argue that "the two seas" that meet are Moses and Khidr, Moses represented the sea of exotericism, and Khidr represented the sea of esotericism. In this sense, this "analogy encourages Sūfīs to undertake arduous travels in search of knowledge, just as Moses strove to achieve knowledge from Khidr" (Halman, 2013, p.65).

Moses and his boy servant (*fatāhu*) journeyed together, the Qur'ān says:

When they reached the place where the two seas meet, they had forgotten all about their fish, which made its way into the sea and swam away. 62 They journeyed on, and then Moses said to his servant, ‘Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring (Q18: 61:62).

It can be seen that the Qur’ān does not give the name of the boy servant of Moses; rather, the text of the Ḥadīth provides additional information, and details regarding the boy servant who is the companion of Moses and also the fish that was a sign of finding Khidr. With regard to the boy servant, who plays an important role with Moses in finding the Servant of God, Khidr, the Ḥadīth states that this servant is “Yusha’ bin Nūn”. This is also supported by al-Ṭabarī, (1959, p.294). However, Yusha’ bin Nūn disappeared after Khidr was found, and was not mentioned at all in the rest of the story. According to al-Ṭabarī the reason for this is:

Someone said to Ibn ‘Abbās "we have not heard any mention of an account about the servant of Moses, although he was with him. Ibn ‘Abbās mentioned the narrative of the servant, saying, "The servant drank the water of eternal life and became immortal. The learned sage (Khidr) took him, fitted him with a ship, and then sent him out to sea. The ship will rock on the sea with him until the day of Resurrection because he drank from the river, which he should not have done (2007, p.16).

With regards to the fish used as a symbol to find Khidr: "God made the fish a sign [*āyā*] to return [to the place where Moses lost it] and there he would meet him [Khidr]" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

As they travelled, Moses and his servant Yusha’ bin Nūn rested on a rock. Suddenly, the fish that they had brought as a meal disappeared when water droplets were sprinkled on it. In other words, the fish came back to life; this was due to the fish having drunk from the same water of life. According to Sūfī tradition, anyone who drinks from the water of life becomes immortal; Khidr

also drank from it, and for that reason he is still alive (Sands, 2006, p.81). This will be discussed in the ensuing pages. Moses and his servant journeyed together, the Ḥadīth narrates:

The next morning Moses asked his boy servant 'Bring us our early meal; no doubt, we have suffered much fatigue in this journey of ours.' Moses did not get tired till he had passed the place which Allah had ordered him to seek after. His boy-servant then said to him, 'Do you remember when we betook ourselves to the rock, I indeed forgot the fish, none but Satan made me forget to remember it. It took its course into the sea in a marvellous way'. There was a tunnel for the fish and for Moses and his boy-servant there was astonishment. Moses said, 'That is what we have been seeking'. So they went back, retracing their footsteps. They both returned, retracing their steps till they reached the rock. Behold! There they found a man [Khidr] covered with a garment (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

Moses found the Servant of God, who is unanimously agreed to be Khidr. According to the text of Ḥadīth the first conversation between them was as follows:

Khidr said who are you?' Moses said, 'I am Moses.' Khidr said, 'Are you the Moses of Israel?' Moses said, 'Yes.' Khidr said, 'what do you want?' Moses said, 'I came to you so that you may teach me about the truth which you were taught.' Khidr said, 'Is it not sufficient for you that the Torah is in your hands and the Divine Inspiration comes to you, O Moses?' Khidr then said, 'You will not be able to have patience with me.' Moses said, 'God willing, you will find me patient, and I will not disobey you in anything.' Khidr then said to Moses that if you follow me, do not ask me about anything until I make mention of it to you (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

In other words, Khidr said to Moses that you should be patient. It seems Khidr knew that he would do things that ostensibly going against the Moses' message. Moses has given a promise

to Khidr that he will be patient, and not ask any questions, with regards what he has been seen until it will be explained by Khidr.

The greetings and the identity between Moses and Khidr also supports Ibn 'Abbas' view that the companion of Khidr in the story is the Prophet Moses who was sent to the Sons of Israel. It can also be understood from the conversation between Moses and Khidr that Moses' journey to Khidr took place after Moses received the Torah as Khidr says to Moses "Is it not sufficient for you that the Torah is in your hands", which means the reactions of Moses to Khidr's actions and his decisions in the story are informed by the Torah. However, this also opens the door of reflection to the relationship between prophecy and other types of knowledge. Halman, (2013, p. 108) has argued that "The story of Moses' journey with Khidr explicitly compares prophecy and scripture on the one hand with directly-disclosed inner knowledge *'ilm ladunī*", on the other hand. This pair also suggests an encoding of the relationship between orality and literacy in the transmission of knowledge and the development of culture. It is the question of the transmission from Khidr to Moses that is left unexplored in the Ḥadīth".

2.2.2 The Events in the Story

According to the text of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, there are three main vague events that happen during their journey; which are:

- 1) The issue of the ship
- 2) The boy who was killed by Khidr
- 3) The issue of the wall

First, Moses and Khidr wanted to cross the sea, and they found the ship, which was full of travelers who recognised Khidr and they rode it. After a period of time, the ship was broken by Khidr, which allowed water to enter the ship; at that moment Moses says to Khidr "you have done a strange

thing" and Khidr reminded him that "he should be patient and not ask questions". In other words, Khidr reminded Moses that he had forgotten his promise (Q 18:60-82 & Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

The second event took place when they passed the sea, they found a young boy, and Khidr killed him; Moses was horrified, and forgot his promise, and said "Have you killed a pure soul for other than [having killed] a soul? You have certainly done a deplorable thing." Khidr reminded him once again "Did I not tell you that with me you would never be able to have patience?" at this moment, Khidr said, "If I should ask you about anything after this, then do not keep me as a companion. You have obtained from me an excuse." and they continued on (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

Finally, they came to a town and asked the people to feed them since they were hungry after the long journey. The people refused them and instead of confronting the people who are living in the town, Khidr rebuilt the wall that was collapsing. Moses could not understand why he did not ask for payment. Khidr then informed Moses that this was the end of their journey together. However, he would explain the reasons why he acted the way he did in all three situations (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

2.2.3 Analysis of the Dialogue between Moses and Khidr in the Story

Before explaining the reasons behind the acts that are performed by Khidr, it should be noted that there are three main conversations that took place between Khidr and Moses during their journey. These took place when the ship was broken, when the boy was killed, and when the wall was rebuilt. It seems that the Prophet Moses broke the promise that he gave to Khidr to be patient three times. However, according to the text of the Ḥadīth, there may have been general justifications and other specific reasons for that.

With regards to general justifications, as mentioned, Moses was criticised at the beginning by Khidr, who said that Moses will not be able to have patience with Khidr (18:72). This might be due to Khidr already knowing that he would do things that ostensibly go against Moses' message, such as when he killed an ostensibly sinless boy. Moses could not understand that there were reasons, justifications and a purpose behind Khidr's actions, which were later explained by Khidr. Therefore, Khidr knows that the Prophet Moses will not be able to have patience. This perhaps explains the position of Khidr, who says according to the Qur'ān, "How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?" (Q18:68). This illustrates that Moses could not understand Khidr's knowledge, because Khidr had knowledge from God that Moses did not share, and conversely, Moses had knowledge of God which Khidr did not know; Khidr said to Moses according to the Ḥadīth text "I have some of the knowledge of God, which God has taught me and which you do not know, while you have some of the knowledge of God, which God has taught you and which I do not know" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 122, Book 3, Ḥadīth 64).

In fact, there are hidden factors that Khidr can see, but the Prophet Moses cannot. Therefore, Moses was not able to have patience with Khidr. In this regard, there is another narration, by Muslim, which is the only narration that gives more details about Khidr's knowledge than al-Bukhārī's. Ibn 'Abbās reported that one of the *Imāms* wrote to Ibn 'Abbās to ask him "Did the Messenger Muḥammad ever kill children?", to which Ibn 'Abbās stated, "the Prophet Muḥammad never killed children and you should never kill children, except if you have the knowledge of Khidr" (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Book 19, Ḥadīth 4456).

This means, that if you had esoteric knowledge like Khidr, you could take action on it, which is an indication that Khidr works with unseen knowledge, prompting Moses' impatience. However, both the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth refer to an important point that could be taken as justification for Moses' lack of patience, which is that the promise that was given by Moses was with the condition that his patience is by "God's will", which means "God willing, you will find me patient" (Q 18:69).

This means that patience depends on God, not on the Prophet Moses. To support this, in the Arabic language when people say “God Willing” in relation to a matter, it means that the matter has not been confirmed. This means that Moses did not know whether God wanted him to be patient or not. This understanding can also be found in the following verses of the Qur’ān: “do not say of anything, ‘I will do that tomorrow, without adding, ‘God willing’” (18:23-24). Another explanation of Moses' behavior is that Moses had not been informed that he would see things that went against his message because the knowledge that Moses was asked to learn was limited to sound judgement. The Qur’ān says: "Moses said to him, ‘May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?’” (18:66).

To be more precise, the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth demonstrate specific reasons for Moses' lack of patience; the first excuse is forgetting. This can be seen when the planks were removed from the boat by Khidr. The Prophet Moses noticed what Khidr was doing, and was astonished and said, "How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!" (Q 18: 71). Khidr then reprimanded Moses for not keeping his promise; Moses replied: "Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you." (Q 18:73). According to this, the first excuse of the Prophet Moses was that he was forgetful, which may produce situations where the believer is excused (Q 1:286).

However, the Prophet Moses did not forget his promise again in the second situation; he intentionally demanded an immediate explanation for actions that seemed to him unjust and inexplicable at that moment. This took place when the boy was killed by Khidr; Moses says, “How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!” (Q 18:74). A possible explanation for this may be that Moses found himself in a very strange situation that was contrary to divine law, and was not logical or justified in his perception. Therefore, his reaction to it was not surprising, as can be understood from the following Ḥadīth:

Khidr said to Moses, "Did I not tell you that you can have no patience with me?" Moses then violated the agreement for the first time because of forgetfulness; then Moses promised that if he asked Khidr about anything, the latter would have the right to desert him. Moses abided by that condition, (But, in fact, he did not in the second instance). On the third occasion, he intentionally asked Khidr and caused that condition to be applied (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

Therefore, the first excuse for Moses' lack of patience is forgetfulness, and in the second instance, Moses intentionally demanded an immediate explanation for Khidr's action. This also happened on the third occasion, but for a different reason, which led Khidr to say, "This is where you and I part company" (Q 18:78). This took place when Khidr rebuilt the wall that was collapsing. Moses could not understand why he did not ask for payment.

2.2.4 The Evaluation of Moses and Khidr by the Prophet Muḥammad

After the third situation, the Prophet Muḥammad evaluated Moses situation by saying that "We wished that Moses could have been more patient so that God might have described to us more about their story" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123). It was not usual for the Prophet Muḥammad to comment on a Qur'ānic story, but he evaluated this story, which may indicate that "the final judgment by Muḥammad implicitly lauds Khidr's knowledge, at the same time as it underscores Moses's lack of patience. On both accounts, the prophetic dictum opens a way for reflection on the meaning of Khidr's role. In a related interpretation, the Prophet also distinguished Moses' role in bringing the journey to a close" (Halman, 2013, p.76).

2.2.5 Interpretation of Events

Khidr then explained all three actions that had astonished Moses:

As for the ship, it belonged to poor people working at sea. So I intended to cause a defect in it, as there was after them a king who seized every [good] ship by force. And as for the boy,

his parents were believers, and we feared that he would overburden them by transgression and disbelief. So we intended that their Lord should substitute for them one better than him in purity and nearer to mercy. And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them, and their father had been righteous. So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

Al-Bukhārī provides additional details about the boy who was killed by Khidr, the king who took all ships by force, and the companions on the ship. According to the Ḥadīth, the boy who was killed by Khidr in the story was Haisur: "They say that the boy was called Haisur" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123). According to the Ḥadīth, the king who took ships by force was Hudad bin Budad: "It is said that the king was Hudad bin Budad" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Book 73, Ḥadīth 169).

2.2.6 The Person of the 'Servant of God' (Khidr), and the Time Period of the Story

As mentioned, the Qur'ān did not name the Servant of God; rather he was identified elsewhere as Khidr 'the green man'. This is due to the Ḥadīth where it was narrated by the Prophet Muḥammad that "Khidr was named so because he sat over a barren white land, and it turned green with vegetation after [he sat over it]" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Vol. 4, Book 55, Ḥadīth 614). As mentioned in this Ḥadīth, 'Khidr' represents a color, which refers to a place having green plants. This is because when Khidr walked through any barren land in which nothing was growing, after he settled down there, everything would become green. However, Sūfīs argued that this color represents "freshness of spirit and eternal liveliness" (Omar, 1993, p.4); this is because Sūfīs believe that Khidr came to be known as eternal and immortal in this life. This leads to one of the most debated subjects regarding Khidr, which is whether he is still alive or has passed away; this will be discussed later.

Regarding the time period of the story, al-Ṭabarī has related several opinions about the origins, and the time period, related to the Servant of God, Khidr. Some say that he was the "offspring of a man who believed in Abraham while others say that Khidr was of the progeny of Persia. Another report, which is supported by al-Ṭabarī, says that " Dhū al-Qarnayn, who lived in the era of Abraham, was Afridhun b. Athfiyan, and that over the vanguard of Dhū al-Qarnayn was Khidr" (al-Ṭabarī, 2007, pp.3-4).

To conclude, further details about the story can be understood from the texts of Ḥadīth. For example, it becomes clear through the Ḥadīth that the Moses who is mentioned with Khidr in the story is the Prophet Moses who was sent to the children of Israel, the same Moses who received the Torah. Khidr's name and the reason behind Moses' journey to meet Khidr are also clarified. Al-Bukhārī provides additional details regarding the boy servant who is the companion of Moses and the fish that was taken as a sign of finding Khidr. The Ḥadīth state that the servant was Yusha` bin Nūn, and this is also supported by al-Ṭabarī. With regards to the fish, "God made the fish a sign to return [to the place where Moses lost it] and there he would meet him [Khidr]" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

Al-Bukhārī also provides additional details about the boy who was killed by Khidr and the king who took all the ships by force. According to the Ḥadīth, the boy who was killed by Khidr in the story is Haisur and the king who commandeered the ships was Hudad bin Budad.

The Ḥadīth text also provides more detail about the knowledge of both Moses and Khidr. Khidr had knowledge from God that Moses did not share, and conversely, Moses had knowledge from God that Khidr did not know.

2.2 Sūfī Narratives and Tales about Khidr

The tales and narratives about Khidr that constitute the Sūfī claim that they have encountered Khidr in their journeys reached the extent that there were none of the saints which people loved

and respected except that it is claimed they have met Khidr¹⁴. Such a meeting is a high honor for a saint and raises him far above his peers. Therefore, Medieval Sūfīs, such as Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 900) and Ibn ʿArabī (d.1240), claimed to have met Khidr in their journeys; he gave them advice, answered their questions and inspired them, leading to many tales and transmitted reports about Khidr. Not only this but also Sūfīs, paid attention to recording what they saw and heard of such tales to explain and resolve ambiguities about Khidr.

Probably the first to have claimed that he met Khidr is al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 900) who wrote many books on religious sciences and is a trustworthy authority on the traditions of the Prophet. He began a commentary on the Qurʾān but did not live long enough to finish it. He learned jurisprudence from Muḥammad Hakim, who was an intimate friend of Abū Hanifa. The Hakimis, a Sūfī sect in his region, are his followers. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī is said to have been associated with Khidr. His disciple, Abū Bakr Warrāq (d.893), relates that Khidr used to visit him every Sunday, and they used to converse with each other (al-Hujwīrī, 1976, p.166).

Another example is that of Warrāq himself, who said "I composed a work on theology and mysticism which could hardly be comprehended by the intellect. My brother Khidr desired it of me, and God bade the waters bring it to him" (al-Hujwīrī, 1976, p.125).

Another example is Ibn ʿArabī who has claimed that he met Khidr three times during his life. The first meeting was in Seville when Khidr said to Ibn ʿArabī "'Accept what the Shaykh says!' I immediately turned to Shaykh 'Uryabī and before I spoke he said: 'O Muḥammad, does that mean that every time you contradict me, I will have to ask Khidr to instruct you in submission to the

¹⁴ Franke has mentioned in his study *Begegnung met Khidr* (2000), about 150 Sūfīs stories regarding their meeting with Khidr from the ninth century to twentieth.

masters?' I replied: 'Master, was that person Khidr?' He answered: 'Yes!'" (Munawar, 2015, pp.133-38).

Ibn 'Arabī met Khidr for the second time while he was returning from Tunis: "One night, traveling by boat, he saw a man walking on the water towards him. Upon reaching the boat, Khidr stood on the sea and showed him that his feet were still dry. After that, Khidr conversed with Ibn 'Arabī in a language which is peculiar to him" (Munawar, 2015, pp.133-38). Regarding the third meeting, "Ibn 'Arabī had his third meeting with Khidr upon reaching Andalusia. Khidr performed a miracle to provide evidence for a skeptical companion of Ibn 'Arabī " (Munawar, 2015, pp.133-38).

It can be seen that Ibn 'Arabī clearly confirms that he has seen and met Khidr, and he also talks about Khidr's miracles, such as walking on water without his feet getting wet. Khidr also knows what is in one's mind and describes it, and respects the saints and advocates for them against those who deny miracles. Thus, Khidr's role is that of a teacher, as was shown in the Qur'ān in the story of Moses and Khidr. Ibn 'Arabī did not forget to describe the location and specify it geographically, as a means of confirming the tale to the listener.

It can be also seen that Khidr plays an important role in Ibn 'Arabī's thinking, and he relies on Khidr to prove that a saint is different from other people. They are different because a saint is the most knowledgeable, of the highest state, and the most aware of the news of all people; the story of Khidr and Moses is a proof that saints can see what others cannot (Ibn 'Arabī, 2002, p.192). One who has met or received knowledge from Khidr has reached the stage of *Khideri*. *Khideri* is a stage of spirituality wherein the worshipers, having reached this stage, enjoy an elevated degree of faith and are known as righteous servants (*ṣāliḥūn*) because they have learned from Khidr. Also, there are many practices that have been encouraged by Khidr such as the Sūfī way of praying and *dhikr* (remembrance of God). Abu l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d.1258), who established the *ṭarīqa* (path)

al-Shādhilī, claimed that he has received *dhikr* for *ṭarīqa al-Shādhilī*, and some prayers, from Khidr (al-Nabhānī, 1911, pp.1-187).

The stories mentioned above are only examples of the many Sūfīs who have claimed that they have had a meeting with Khidr. As previously noted, Patrick Franke has mentioned in his study *Begegnung met Khidr* (2000), about 150 Sūfīs stories regarding their meeting with Khidr from the ninth century to twentieth, and concluded his discussion that they are considered as imagination. Despite this evaluation, it is clear these narratives have strongly affected medieval Sūfī belief in the understanding of the figure of Khidr. They are considered the main proof of the immortality of Khidr because he drank from the water of life, and also the nature of Khidr, which will be discussed in the next section. Therefore, these narratives about Khidr used as a source for understanding the role and the function of the figure of Khidr by Medieval Sūfism. However, the exaggeration of the use of (the water of life) in these narratives has led some Western scholars to link the story of Moses and Khidr to the legend of Gilgamesh epic and the story of the Prophet Elijah as will be seen in the next section.

To conclude, it can be understood from the narrations and tales about Khidr that Khidr appears to saints, which means according to them he is still alive, and he also has miracles such as walking on water without his feet getting wet. Khidr also knows what is on one's mind and describes it, and respects the saints and advocates for them against those who deny miracles. Thus, Khidr's role is that of a teacher, as has been shown in the Qur'ān in the story of Moses and Khidr.

It can also be understood that Khidr played a major role in saints' thinking, such as with Ibn 'Arabī, who relied on Khidr to prove that is different from other people, as a saint is the most knowledgeable, of the highest state, and the most aware of events. Khidr has accompanied saints, visited them, and conversed with them.

2.3 The Nature of the Figure of Khidr

2.3.1 Introduction

This section will concentrate on the nature of Khidr by answering two questions: is Khidr a prophet or a saint? Is Khidr still alive or has he passed away?

2.3.2 Is Khidr a Prophet or a saint?

A great majority of Sūfī scholars, including al-Qushayrī, (1980, pp.667-68), and Ibn ‘Arabī, (n.d, p.199), refer to Khidr simply as a perfect saint or *walī*, meaning 'friend of God'. Also, there is no consensus of opinion among Sunni scholars with regard to the nature of Khidr. Some of them supported the Sūfī opinion that Khidr is a saint, such as Abū Bakr Muhammad al-Anbari (d. 940) in his book *al-Zāhir* (2004, p.318), while Ibn Taymīyah and his student Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) disagreed, and argued that Khidr is a prophet and not a saint. Ibn Taymīyah was asked whether Khidr is a prophet or saint, stated that Khidr is a prophet:

After the advent of the prophet, neither Khidr nor anyone else received revelation (*waḥī*). As for before the advent of Muḥammad, then people have differed regarding the question of his prophethood. Those who say that he was a prophet do not say that he gave up his prophethood, rather they say he is a prophet like Ilyas, and that he does not receive any revelation at this time. And the absence of revelation for a specified period does not invalidate prophethood, just as the prophet did not receive any *waḥī* at times during the span of his prophethood. And the majority of the scholars believe that Khidr was not a prophet (Ibn Taymīyah, n.d, p.76).

It can be understood from this that Ibn Taymīyah refers to Khidr as a prophet. However, the majority of scholars believe that he was not a prophet, as Ibn Taymīyah mentioned, by which he means Sūfī scholars. Although there is no explicit evidence in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth to identify the nature of Khidr, both Sūfī and Sunni scholars use deductive reasoning to prove their arguments, which are summed up below.

Prophets and messengers that are mentioned in the Qur'ān usually have clear information related to them, including their names and stories about them that may be repeated many times, such as for Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. Furthermore, they played important roles in the communities that they were sent to. However, the case of Khidr is the opposite. Sūfīs argue that if Khidr is a prophet and not a saint, why does not the Qur'ān mention his prophecy, his message or at least his name? As this was the norm with other prophets and messengers, who usually ask people to follow them and believe in the messages they relay from God. In contrast to this, the prophet Moses sought out Khidr in order to acquire knowledge from him (Yoshida, 2009, p.93-94 & Tamtam, 2014, p.7). Also, according to the text of the Qur'ān, Moses defied Khidr three times (Q18: 71:77). If Khidr was a prophet, Moses would not have defied Khidr three times, due to the infallibility of the prophets.

Ibn Kathīr argued that this issue can be answered by looking at what Moses says to Khidr:

Moses said to him, 'May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?' The man said, 'You will not be able to bear with me patiently. How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?' Moses said, 'God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way.' (Q18:66-69).

According to Ibn Kathīr this dialogue between Moses and Khidr illustrates that:

If Khidr were a saint and not a prophet, he would not have addressed Moses thus, nor would Moses have replied as he did. Since Moses sought out Khidr to gain knowledge which had been revealed to Khidr and not Moses, Khidr must have been infallible, for Moses was established as a prophet and his infallibility was thus undeniable. When Moses met Khidr, he was humble and followed and obeyed him, all of which indicates that he was a prophet like Moses, to whom God had revealed Himself [...] and had endowed with mystical

knowledge and the secrets of prophethood, with which He had not endowed Moses (Ibn Kathīr, 2010, p.338).

The term 'mercy' is also relevant to this argument; it is repeated many times in the Qur'ān, especially to describe prophethood (21:107). Khidr is referred to as a bringer of mercy in the Qur'ān. This can be understood from the Qur'ānic verse that introduces Khidr: "found one of Our servants— a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own" (Q 18:65). According to Ibn Kathīr, "mercy should be interpreted as prophethood, and "from our side" (*min ladunnā*), from God's eternal knowledge or revelation, the prime qualification for prophethood" (Ibn Kathīr, 2000, p.156). Therefore, according to Ibn Kathīr, Khidr was a prophet and not a saint. However, some might argue that although prophethood is mercy, it does not necessarily mean that mercy is prophethood. It exists in other situations in the Qur'ān, such as "We sent other messengers to follow in their footsteps. After those We sent Jesus, son of Mary: We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers" (57:27). Many would agree with this to some extent, but it should not be forgotten that the term 'mercy' usually refers to prophethood in the Qur'ān. For example, God says in the Qur'ān "It was only as a mercy that We sent you [prophet] to all people" (21:107). This verse shows that the Qur'ān also refers to the prophet Muḥammad as a mercy from God. There are also other prophets described as bringing mercy from God, such as Noah, Moses, and Jesus (Tamtam, 2014, p.9). Therefore, these arguments are deficient in determining whether Khidr is a prophet or saint, as both sides can be understood from the Qur'ānic text.

Perhaps one of the most convincing pieces of evidence to support Ibn Kathīr's argument is that Khidr's murder of the boy was inspired by divine revelation (Q18:73). "This evidence establishes his prophethood, for it is proof of his infallibility. Saints may not kill, for their conscience is not infallible, they may even, by chance, err" (Ibn Kathīr, 2010, p.338). This also indicates that Khidr murdered the boy according to a divine revelation, which is limited only to the prophets. This can

also be proved at the end of the story when Khidr explains the significance of his actions to Moses; Khidr concludes "I did not do [these things] of my own accord" (18:82). However, *Shaikh 'Abdul-Qādir Jīlānī* one of the greatest medieval Sūfī scholars (d. 1166), in his interpretation, *Tafsīr 'Abdul-Qādir Jīlānī* (2009, p.35) argued that "I did not do it of my own accord" does not mean by "divine revelation" but by a type of inspiration, which according to him can be given to saints. In addition, there is a narration mentioned in al-Bukhārī that may prove that Khidr is a saint, which took place when Moses and Khidr wanted to cross the sea: "They found a small boat which used to carry people from this side of the sea to the other side of the sea. The crew recognised Khidr and said, "The pious slave of God" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Vol. 6, Book 60, Ḥadīth 250). Therefore, if Khidr is a prophet, the crew of the boat would refer to him as 'prophet', not as 'The pious slave of God', which is a common way of referring to saints. Therefore, the controversy was never resolved; for some Sunni scholars, Khidr is a prophet, while among Sūfīs, Khidr is a saint. However, the majority of scholars believe that he is not a prophet.

2.3.3 Is Khidr Still Alive or Has He Passed Away?

Medieval Sūfīs believe that Khidr has come to be eternal and immortal in this life. The first proof of this is because Khidr drank from the water of life, which represents the source of life. Not only this, but Sūfīs have also claimed that they met Khidr on their journeys and he gave them advice, answered their questions, and inspired them, which is considered to be the second proof that Khidr is still alive. *Imām Nawawī* (d.1277) a Sunni scholar, in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, argued that the majority of Muslim scholars hold that Khidr is still alive, and he is with us, and "this is agreed upon between the people of *Taṣawwuf*, and the people of righteousness and gnosis (*ma'arifa*)". He claims this can be proved:

The narratives regarding witnessing him, meeting with him, taking knowledge from him, asking him questions and receiving answers from him, and his presence in noble and good

situations and abodes are more than can be enumerated and more famous than can be concealed (2006, p.173).

It can be understood that one of the main evidences for Khidr still being alive is derived from those who have met Khidr as "there are mass transmitted reports from Sūfīs on meeting Khidr" (Nawawī, 2006, p.173). Examples of such tales are mentioned in the previous section (*Sūfī Narratives and Tales about Khidr*). However, to what extent can these narratives be considered reliable? Ibn Taymīyah (n.d, p.123) argued that they are unreliable because they are either fictitious or dreams that could have come from Satan. The problem with this opinion is that Ibn Taymīyah himself reported two different views on this issue. Both are mentioned in his book *Majmū' fātāwa Ibn Taymīyah al-ḥadīth* (2005, p.76). The first view is that Khidr is still alive; Ibn Taymīyah was asked whether Khidr was still alive or had passed away, and he answered that Khidr was still alive. He also defended this view and rebutted the evidence that was used by those who claimed Khidr had passed away. This evidence is derived from the text of relevant Ḥadīths. The first Ḥadīth is that prophet Muḥammad said: "Had Khidr been alive, he would surely have visited me". Ibn Taymīyah commented on this Ḥadīth by saying that "this Ḥadīth has no basis, and no *isnād* is known for it either. On the contrary, what has been narrated in *Musnad al-Shafi'i* and other books is that 'Khidr' did meet the prophet" (2005, p.76).

The second Ḥadīth is the following: "Have you seen this night of yours? At the end of one hundred years after this none will survive on the surface of the earth" (Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Book 38, Ḥadīth 4334). Ibn Taymīyah also commented on this Ḥadīth, saying that "there is no proof for him in it, for it is possible that Khidr was not on the surface of the earth at that moment"(2005, p.76).

The second view taken by Ibn Taymīyah is the opposite of his first view, which is that Khidr has passed away. This also took place when Ibn Taymīyah was asked about whether Khidr and Elijah are still alive or not. He answered that they had passed away and were not immortal.

Many explanations have been provided by different scholars to analyse Ibn Taymīyah's contradictory statements on this issue. One is that the first opinion is in fact not the view of Ibn Taymīyah, but was claimed on his behalf in order to prove that Ibn Taymīyah was a mystic, as his first view supports Sūfī opinions, which opens another debate between Islamic scholars as to whether Ibn Taymīyah was a Sūfī or Sunnī. However, the first view of Ibn Taymīyah should not be ignored because it is at odds with the second one; this requires analysis, especially since when he was asked about Khidr and Elijah together, he suggested that they had both passed away, yet when he was asked about Khidr only, he argued that he is still alive.

The water of life is considered as the second proof of the immortality of Khidr. In fact, this element is very common in Sūfī works, Sands (2006, p.82) says that “Khidr’s immortality is often mentioned in Sūfī works, especially in his role as a spiritual initiator”. However, as discussed in the literature review this has been challenged in recent scholarship. Brannon Wheeler in his book *Moses in the Qur’ān and Islamic Exegesis* (2002), has argued that this element of the water of life is not mentioned explicitly in the text of the Qur’ān, rather it is mentioned only in the commentaries of the Qur’ān. In other words, according to Wheeler, there are stories in circulation that were adopted by the *mafassirūn* and taken as an explanation for vague Qur’anic passages. This is considered, according to Wheeler, as the main point that is used to link the story of Khidr with the legend of Gilgamesh epic and the prophet Elijah. However, Sands argued that Wheeler does not consider that the commentators of the Qur’ān attributed such details (the water of life and the fish that become alive) to the Ḥadīth text. Sands in this regard refers to the Ḥadīth narrated by Ubayy b. Ka’b of which there is only one version of this Ḥadīth (of multiple versions) that includes details about the water of life:

Moses set out with his boy and a salted fish. It had been said to him, “When this fish comes to life in a certain place, your companion will be there and you will have found what you are looking for.” So Moses set out with his boy and the fish that they carried. He traveled until

the journey wore him out and he reached the rock and the water, the water of life (*mā' al-ḥayāt*). Anyone who drank from it became immortal and nothing that was dead could approach it without coming to life. When they had stopped and the water touched the fish, it came to life and took its way through the sea (al-Ṭabarī, 1959, p. 279)¹⁵.

As mentioned this is the only version of the Ḥadīth that mentions *mā' al-ḥayāt* 'the water of life'. In fact, Ibn Ḥajar in *Fath al-Bārī sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (2000, p.415) has mentioned the chain of transmission *isnād* of this Ḥadīth, which is narrated by al-Hasan ibn 'Amara, from al-Hakam ibn Utaiba, from Sa'id ibn Jubayr. Ibn Ḥajar has explicitly argued that the extra information in this narration which is "the water of life (*mā' al-ḥayāt*) anyone who drank from it became immortal and nothing that was dead could approach it without coming to life" is considered interpolated (*mudrāj*) and weak (*ḍa'īf*), because it is derived from al-Hasan ibn 'Amara who is considered *matrūk matruk al-Ḥadīth*, meaning his narration of Ḥadīth is disregarded. Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Ḥanbal was asked about him he said that he is *matrūk al-Ḥadīth*, and his narrations are weak (Ibn Ḥajar 2000, p.415). Therefore, Wheeler has made a strong argument in this regard that the commentators should reconsider some of the alleged sources used to understand the story of Moses and Khidr; additionally, Western scholars should distinguish between the Qur'ānic text and its interpretation by the commentators of the Qur'ān.

To conclude, this section has expounded upon the nature of Khidr, the 'Servant of God', which has been given a great deal of attention by Islamic scholars, particularly concerning whether he is a prophet or saint, and whether he is still alive or has he passed away. Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this section, it is now possible to state that Sūfī scholars accept that Khidr is a perfect saint *walī* and still alive. Although the claim that Khidr is still alive depends on the

¹⁵ The translation of this Ḥadīth has been quoted from Sands (2006, p.81).

“mass transmitted reports from the righteous on meeting Khidr” this view is considered very common, and the majority of Sūfī scholars believe it.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, and other sources interpret the story of Moses and Khidr. Overall, most of these sources refer to Khidr and Moses as they have engaged in a teaching relationship. The Qur’ān features a narrative in chapter Cave (18:60-82), which tells of the Prophet Moses seeking the servant of God Khidr to learn from him. In addition, The Qur’ān has no definition of the 'Servant of God', but the Qur’ān described him as a wise, knowledgeable and merciful person, which opens a way for reflection on the state of Khidr, especially his knowledge. Moses, a Prophet, and Messenger, who was given the Torah, was sent to learn this knowledge. This makes Khidr important and led to the Prophet Muḥammad commenting on and evaluating this story by referring to the relationship between Khidr's knowledge on one hand, and Moses' lack of patience on the other. The servant Khidr is not named in the text of the Qur’ān itself, however, the Ḥadīth first mentioned his name. In addition, the Ḥadīth text mentions that Khidr had knowledge from God that Moses did not share, but without articulating how it might be transferred or learned. In the Ḥadīth, Khidr’s status is given as a teacher. Despite this, the Prophet Muhammad has evaluated Moses’ failure with Khidr as a student. In fact, this is one of the most significant points in the Ḥadīth reports concerning Moses’ journey with Khidr is the Prophet Muhammad’s summary evaluation of the prophet Moses: “We would have wished that Moses had been more patient; then God would have narrated more of their story”. Despite that there is still yet no clear reference in the narrative of both the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth regarding the nature of Khidr and for how his knowledge can be learned? However, this is found in Sūfī tales and transmitted reports about Khidr, which shows that al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 900), is probably the first to claim that he met Khidr. Khidr according to these narratives is still alive and performed miracles such as walking on water without his feet getting wet. Khidr also knows what is on others’ minds and

discusses it and respects the saints and advocates for them against those who deny miracles. Although it is difficult to evaluate such narrations, these narratives have strongly affected the Sūfī understanding of the figure of Khidr, as there are two purposes behind the meeting of Khidr. First, such a meeting is a high honor for a saint and raises him far above his peers. Second, according to Sūfīs, Khidr has given saints advice, answered their questions and inspired them.

Chapter 3:

Khidr's Symbolism in Medieval Sūfī Beliefs.

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has examined interpretations of the story of Moses with Khidr from the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and Sūfī narratives about Khidr, which suggested that Khidr and Moses are engaged in a teaching relationship. This relationship has led to consideration of the concept of prophethood and its relationship to the sainthood, as Moses is a Prophet and Khidr is a saint. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767) who is an early Qur'ānic commentator has commented on the narrative of Khidr and Moses by saying that: "Moses' journey with Khidr happened after he had received the Torah. And Khidr achieved immortality based on his obedience, selfless motives, and adherence to divine unity, and Khidr is not only an elevated or distinguished prophet, but also a saint" (Nwyia, 1970, pp. 88-90). This last statement represents a very early identification of Khidr as a saint, and according to Halman this "suggestion of sainthood as in some way superior to prophecy" (2013, p. 98). Sūfī ultimately designate that Moses and Khidr relationship as prophethood and sainthood. However, the question that needs to be asked, has this led Sūfīs to believe that saints can be of a higher rank than prophets, and how this is related to the knowledge of both Moses and Khidr? According to the Ḥadīth text, and also mentioned above that "Moses' journey with Khidr happened after he had received the Torah". This implies that "Moses' knowledge and his decisions in the story are at least potentially informed by the Torah" (Halman, 2013, p. 98). However, Moses according to the story could not understand the knowledge of Khidr, and the story explicitly compares their knowledge. However, the Sūfīs have explained this knowledge as esoteric knowledge which can be inspired to saints as was Khidr who is a saint. Consequently, the question that needs to be added and addressed is what the nature of that knowledge is and how it can be acquired? This and the above question will be under the consideration on this chapter in two sections, they are:

- 1) Khidr: The Question of the Superiority of Saints Over Prophets
- 2) Khidr: A Symbol of Esoteric Knowledge.

3.2 Khidr: The Question of the Superiority of Saints Over Prophets

Saint (*walī*) as a technical term is mentioned in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth text in different verses¹⁶, however, the first who established or introduced the theory of the seal of the saints *walāya*¹⁷ as a doctrine to the Sūfī is the mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d.900) in his book *Khatm al-awliyā’*, *the seal of the saints* (1999). Al-Tirmidhī has argued that “there are many stages of saints *awliyā’ Allāh*, some of them who are given one-third of prophecy, some of them who are given a half of prophecy, and there are some who have more than this until they reach the stage of the seal of the saints *awliyā’ Allāh*” (1999, p.347).

To analyse this, it can be clearly noted that al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī is referring to the seal of the saints as the last stage of sainthood (*walāya*), which means the one who has reached this stage is considered their seal. It should also be noted that, according to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, prophethood can be divided into multiple parts, as he said some are given a third and others half; in addition, a saint can receive a part of the prophethood. Prophethood is not limited to the prophets and messengers, but it also extends to the saints. Although some might argue that no one has this rank except the prophets and messengers, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's response was to ask whether the Ḥadīth of Prophet Muḥammad was known: “Good way, dignified good bearing, and moderation are the twenty-fifth part of prophecy” (Sunan Abū Dāwūd. Book 42, Ḥadīth 4758). Therefore, according to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (1999, p.347), if Prophet Muḥammad has the characteristics mentioned in this Ḥadīth, what about others? From this one could infer that there is someone who possesses more than these characteristics, who, according to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, is the seal of the saints *Khatm al-awliyā’*. This seal according to al-Tirmidhī should pass a test or a 157-item

¹⁶ Examples: from the Qur’ān are (5-55) and (8-34). From the Ḥadīth is (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Book 3, Ḥadīth 38).

¹⁷ *Walāya* is “the opposite of enmity. The origin of *walāya* is love and nearness, and the origin of enmity is hatred and distance...the *walī* is one who is near'. It should also be noted that both *walāya* and *wilāya* are correct, but I have chosen the first as it is Ibn ‘Arabī’s own preference” (Dajani, 2015, p.6).

questionnaire that has been included in his book *Khatm al-awliyā'*. In other words, according to al-Tirmidhī the person who considers himself worthy to achieve the secret of sainthood *walāya* should answer these questions.

Before to referring to these questions and their relationship to the story of Khidr on one hand and the first to pass this test on another hand, it should be noted that this analysis does not explicitly say that a saint can become higher than a prophet, which is the fundamental claim of the section, as al-Tirmidhī himself did not state that explicitly. However, some¹⁸ would have understood from al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's statement that there could be an allusion to the superiority of saints over the prophets. This can also be understood from the last part, where he said, "what about the others", which could refer to a saint who has more than those qualities mentioned in the Ḥadīth, therefore how about his status? This can be supported by the belief of the seal of the saints, which is, in fact, compared to the seal of the prophets. While it could potentially imply superiority, the basis of such a claim is not clear because 'compared to' does not necessarily mean 'superior to'. However, maybe the most obvious evidence related to this claim is found in the story of Moses and Khidr, as there are some Sufi scholars who have argued that Khidr who is a *walī* has knowledge that Moses who is a prophet did not have in the Qur'ānic story. This may explain the potential of superiority of saints over prophets at least in relation to their knowledge. This position is found in al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in his book *Khatm al-awliyā'*, *the seal of the saints* (1999, pp.347-48) where he argues that Khidr is a saint (*walī*) who has a higher rank than Moses, who is a prophet in the Qur'ānic story. This is because Khidr had knowledge that is considered esoteric knowledge, which Moses did not share. Khidr said to Moses, according to the Ḥadīth text:

¹⁸ For example, Ibn Taymīyah who will be mentioned later in this analysis.

I (Khidr) have knowledge which God has taught me, and which you (Moses) do not know, and you have knowledge which God has taught you and which I do not know (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Book 3, Ḥadīth 123)

This evidence within the story of Moses and Khidr and its relationship to this claim can be addressed in two aspects. The first aspect is that it is known that Moses was sent by God to Khidr to learn from him. The Qur'ān says:

Moses said, 'Then that was the place we were looking for.' So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps, and found one of Our servant— a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own (Q 18:64:65).

This verse raises the question of how could Khidr teach the prophet Moses knowledge that the latter did not know? In other words, if Moses sought out Khidr in order to learn from him, does this refer to Khidr having a higher rank than Moses? If Khidr is a saint (*walī*), which is the issue of dispute between Islamic scholars as mentioned in Chapter 2, is it possible for sainthood *walāya* to be a higher rank than prophets and messengers?

The second aspect relates to who is more knowledgeable than the other. In other words, does the knowledge of Khidr that Moses did not have mean that Khidr has a higher rank than Moses?

The relationship between the Qur'ānic story of Moses and Khidr and the belief in the superiority of the saints over prophets can be understood by answering these questions, which have been addressed by Islamic scholars in many fields. However, the first to discuss this belief and was a near contemporary of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī is the mystic al-Sarrāj (d.988) in his book *The Kitāb al-luma' fi'l- Taṣawwuf*. Although al-Sarrāj does not mention al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī by his name, he has linked the claim of the superiority of saints by using the story of Moses and Khidr by saying that:

Some assert¹⁹ that saintship is superior to prophecy, an error that is caused by their arbitrary speculations on the story of Moses and Khidr (Q 18:64). He introduces as evidence that God confers peculiar gifts and endowments in accordance with His inscrutable will, examples of prophets and other persons who were thus distinguished. The miracles of the saints are granted to them in virtue of their obedience to the prophet of their time. How, then, can the follower be pronounced superior to the leader? As regards the argument that the saints receive inspiration directly from God, whereas the prophets receive it through an intermediary, the truth is that the inspiration of the prophets is continuous, while the inspiration of the saints is only occasional. Khidr could not have borne a single atom of the illumination that Moses enjoyed. Saintship is illumined by the splendour of prophecy, but it never equals prophecy, much less surpasses it (1914, p.114).

In other words, according to al-Sarrāj, we should not forget that according to the Qur’ān God selects for His mercy (particular gifts) whom He wills, and how He wills, as He selected Ādam for the prostration of Angels before him (Q 38:72). He also chose Noah to build a ship and Salih for a she-camel (Q 11:64). He cooled the fire and helped Abraham survive it (Q 21:69). He also selected Jesus to give life to the dead – by permission of God (Q 3:49). These examples are all related to prophets and messengers. However, other examples of God’s mercy do not relate to prophets and messengers, for example, *Āṣif bin Barkhiyā*, who had knowledge of the revealed Scripture, brought Bilqīs to Sulaymān, as the Qur’ān says: “but one of them who had some knowledge of the Scripture said, ‘I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye’” (Q 27:40).

However, it is not believed that *Āṣif bin Barkhiyā* had a higher rank than Sulaymān who had prophecy, knowledge, and understanding.

¹⁹ He did not name them.

This has been supported by the mystic al-Solamī (d.1021)²⁰ who admits that Khidr is more knowledgeable than Moses who is a prophet in the Qur’ānic story. However, he argued that this does not mean that Khidr was superior to Moses in "state and station" (Honerkamp, 2006, p.59). The mystic al-Qushayrī (d.1074)²¹ has also engaged in the relevant discussion in his different books but the most discussion is found in his well-known work *al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Sūfism al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya Fī ‘ilm al-Taṣawwuf*. After al-Qushayrī (2007, p.360) has confirmed that there are various types of miracles that can occur to saints, in this context he asked some important questions, which are: “how is it possible that some saintly miracles may surpass the miracles performed by God’s messengers? And how it is possible thereby to give preference to the friends of God over the prophets?” According to al-Qushayrī saints’ miracles should be lower than prophets' miracles in order to prove that the prophets are truthful in their message on one hand, and it would have been "manifested by any of the saints followers" on another hand. Therefore, saints are considered lower than the prophets, which according to al-Qushayrī can also be proved by the consensus of scholars. As an example in this regard, al-Qushayrī quotes the saying of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī²² who says, “What the Prophets receive is like a water-skin full of honey from which a single drop of honey has fallen. This drop is similar to what all the friends of God possess and that which remains in the container is similar to what our prophet possesses” (2007, p.360).

²⁰ Abū ‘abd-al-rahmān al-solamī, moḥammad b. ḥosayn b. mūsā azdī nīsābūrī. Was Sūfī waiter, born in Nishāpūr, Shafī’i jurisprudence and Sūfism (al-Solamī, 1960 p.454).

²¹ ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Hūzān Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī. "He is teacher and imām. His rank is high and his position is great, and his spiritual life and manifold virtues are well known to the people of the present age. He is the author of many for example al-Qushayrī’s *Epistle on Sūfism al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya Fī ‘ilm al-Taṣawwuf* (al-Hujwārī, 1976, p.195).

²² Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr b. ‘Īsā b. Surūshān al-Bisṭāmī “was born in Bisṭām in north-eastern Persia, the grandson of a Zoroastrian; there he died in, (d. 878) and his mausoleum still stands. The founder of the ecstatic (“drunken”) school of Sūfism, he is famous for the boldness of his expression of the mystic’s complete absorption into the Godhead. In particular his description of a journey into Heaven (in imitation of the Prophet Mohammad’s “ascension”), greatly elaborated by later writers, exercised a powerful influence on the imagination of all who came after him” (Aṭṭār, 2007, p.119).

This statement of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī confirmed the superiority of the prophets over the saints. However, some could have argued that it has also been found that Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, himself, has also insinuated the superiority of saints in another place where he states, “I set forth on an ocean when the prophets were still by the shore” (al-Sha‘rānī, 1972, p.16). This statement could refer to the possibility of saints being of a higher rank than prophets. While it could have that meaning, it may mean something else as well. His statement is too brief and vague to be taken to confirm the claim. However, al-Hujwīrī, (d.1077) in his famous Sūfī book *Kashf al-maḥjūb* has agreed with al-Qushayrī that the prophets are superior to the saints. Interestingly, he does not focus on their knowledge as usual or their miracles, rather attention was paid to their attributes as he tried to answer the important question of how can a messenger be inferior to the people to whom he was sent? As “the end of saintship is only the beginning of prophethood. Every a prophet is a saint, but none is a prophet among the saints”. This is because according to al-Hujwīrī “The human attributes of the prophets are non-existent with saints, while the saints attain this state temporarily. The short-lived state of the saints is the permanent station *maqām* of the prophets and that which to the saints is a *maqām* is but a veil to the prophets” (1976, pp.278-81). Al-Hujwīrī concluded his arguments by following al-Qushayrī in the belief that there is a consensus among Islamic scholars that prophets are superior to saints.

It seems that the Sūfī scholars mentioned above have not strongly engaged the belief of superiority of saints over prophets or the theory of the seal of the saints after al-Tirmidhī. While they have briefly discussed the matter in their books, they did not mention al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and his book. This could be due to several reasons. Firstly, they might have been affected by what happened to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, when he introduced his book *Khatm al-awliyā’*, *the seal of the saints* as he was “reportedly exiled toward the end of his life because of writing *Khatm al-awliyā’*” (Dajani, 2015, p.56). Secondly, the lack of mention of al-Tirmidhī may have been because, as Chodkiewicz points out, “the subject-matter cannot be handled without seeming to call into

question prophetic privilege, and therefore needed to be approached with extreme caution” (1993, p.32). Thirdly, it might be due to the test or 157-item questionnaire that is put forth by al-Tirmidhī in his book *Khatm al-awliyā*. As previously mentioned it is for the person who considers himself worthy of the secret of sainthood *walāya*. In other words, according to al-Tirmidhī the person who can answer these questions should be the seal of the saints. The first who ventured to pass this test is Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī, who has answered this questionnaire in his books entitled *al-Jawāb almustaqīm ‘ammā sa’ala ‘anhu al-Tirmidhī al-Ḥakīm, the reply to the questions of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī*. He also provides more explanation in this regard in chapter seventy-three of his book *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya, the Meccan Revelations*. The test is probably the main reason scholars have not strongly engaged this belief till the time of Ibn ‘Arabī, (d.1240) who was highly influenced by al-Tirmidhī. He described al-Tirmidhī as “the *imām* who possessed perfect mystical experience” (2002, p. 2/39& Dajani, 2015, p.61).

Most of Ibn ‘Arabī’s discussion about the belief of the seal of the saints took place when he attempted to answer the questions mentioned by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in his book. The most attention is paid regarding the story of Moses and Khidr in the questions numbers 19 and 83.

In question number 83, which is, what is prophecy? Ibn ‘Arabī distinguishes between prophecy and saints by saying that ‘God gave prophets the title of the prophecy which is restricted to them, but God has also given to Saints that which hasn’t been given to the prophets. According to Ibn ‘Arabī, the meaning of the aforementioned notion applies to Khidr who is a saint *walī* and God has granted him knowledge more than Moses who is a prophet. Ibn ‘Arabī goes on to argue that there are still scholars who claim that Moses is more knowledgeable than Khidr. Ibn ‘Arabī supports this argument by saying that Khidr says to Moses according to the Ḥadīth text that “I (Khidr) have knowledge which God has taught me, and which you (Moses) do not know...” this should mean that God gave saints knowledge which has not been given to anyone before, including prophets. As a result, God made them *faḍā’il wā-maḥaḍū’ā’il*. Furthermore, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, Khidr

says to Moses in the Qur'ān text that (18:68) “How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?”

Ibn ‘Arabī provided more details about the relationship between prophecy and saints while replying to the nineteenth question of “how is the station of the prophets situated in relation to that of the saints?” (Chodkiewicz, 1993, p.34).

Ibn ‘Arabī divided prophecy into two parts, the first part is legislative prophethood (*nubuwwat al-tashrī‘*), which ends with the end of its message. The second part is general prophecy (*nubuwwa ‘amma*), which never ends rather it exists for eternity. This is called the prophecy of the saints (*nubuwwat al-walāya*) by Ibn ‘Arabī. The first part, legislative prophethood that ceases, is similar to what came with the Prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. According to Ibn ‘Arabī this form of prophecy is only related to legislative matters, which would mean that it is not comprehensive. This is how Ibn ‘Arabī explains the position of Prophet Moses, who could not understand Khidr in the story, as Moses has only *nubuwwat al-tashrī‘* (legislative prophethood). The second part, general prophecy that never ends, which could also mean *walāya*, is complete and universal. Ibn ‘Arabī clarifies the position of Khidr who has *nubuwwāt al-walāya* from this basis. He said:

Know that *walāya* is the universal encompassing sphere. This why it is not intersected, and so it is informed about things. As for the prophethood of law-giving and the Message, it is intersected, and it was cut off in Muḥammad. There will be no Prophet after him, either giving law or bound by law. There is no messenger after him, and he is the lawgiver (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d, p.63).

The main issue here is the knowledge of Khidr. As mentioned previously, Khidr is more knowledgeable than Moses in the story, despite the fact that Moses is one of the five greatest prophets and messengers in Islam and he received a message from God. Nevertheless, he was sent to Khidr in order to learn from him. This understanding may have led Ibn ‘Arabī to

distinguish between legislative prophethood (*nubuwwat al-tashrīʿ*), and general prophethood (*nubuwwa ʿāmma*). Therefore, according to this line of reasoning, the seal of the Prophets while special, it ceases; yet, to the contrary, the prophecy of saints (*nubuwwat al-walāya*) is general, but never ending. From this arises the understanding that every saint *walī* could possibly be a prophet, but not every prophet can be a saint *walī*. As a result, this potentially renders the meaning that prophecy in relation to the saints is of a higher status and nearer to God than prophecy alone because it never ceases, and has the highest form of awareness called the esoteric knowledge, *bāṭin*, by Sūfis.

This may be clearer when Ibn ʿArabī comments on the Ḥadīth of Muḥammad's Vision²³ by saying that, it is like the Prophet, in relation to a brick wall, which was complete except for one brick, and the Prophet was that one brick, although he himself only saw the place for the single brick. The seal of the saints must also have this sort of vision. He sees the same as the messenger of God saw, but he sees a place for two bricks in the wall, and that the bricks are made of gold and silver. He sees that there are two bricks missing from the wall, and he sees that they are a silver brick and a gold brick. He must see himself as being disposed of nature to fill the place of these two bricks:

The seal of the saints is these two bricks by which the wall is completed. The necessary reason for which he sees himself as two bricks is that he follows the law *sharīʿa* of the seal of the messengers outwardly – which is the place of the silver brick. This means the outward law *sharīʿa* with all that pertains to it of ordinances, which are taken from God by the secret, according to the outward form which conforms to the secret because he sees the matter for what it really is. He must see the matter in this manner, for it is the place of the golden brick in the inwardly hidden. It is taken from the source from which the angel brought it, the same

²³ The Ḥadīth will be mentioned later.

angel who brought the revelation to the messengers. If you have understood what I have alluded to, then you have indeed acquired useful knowledge! (Ibn ‘Arabī, n.d. pp.12-13).

It can be understood from the preceding passage that the seal of saints has the esoteric knowledge, *bāṭin*, and the seal of the prophets has only the exoteric knowledge, *ẓāhir*, which can be explained from different perspectives.

The first perspective is that the Prophet Muḥammad sees a place for one brick in the wall, but the seal of the saints sees a place for two bricks in the wall, and he sees that they are a silver brick and a gold brick. This indicates that the observation and concentration of the seal of the saints are greater than that of Prophet Muḥammad, as he only noticed the space for one brick, and the seal of the saints noted spaces for two bricks and the bricks' colors.

Secondly, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, where Prophet Muḥammad says, "I am that place where the brick goes; I have come to finalize the chain of Apostles," completion of the building by the Prophet Muḥammad is incomplete, until the seal of the saints came and completed it.

Finally, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, the seal of the saints gained knowledge directly from a higher source than the prophets. Whereas the prophets generally receive revelation from angels and less frequently directly from God “from behind a partition” (Q 42:51), the seal of the saints has gained the knowledge directly from God.

Ibn ‘Arabī has argued that the seal of the prophets is a saint *walī*, a prophet and a messenger, while the seal of saints is considered a saint *walī* and the heir to knowledge. The seal of saints is also contacted directly by God. In Ibn ‘Arabī’s words:

The seal of the messengers, in respect to his *walāya*, is connected to the seal of the *walāya* in the same way in which prophets and messengers are connected to it. He is a *walī*,

messenger, and prophet. The seal of the *walāya* is a *walī* and the heir who takes directly from the source (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d, p.13).

This may have led Ibn ‘Arabī to claims to have a meeting with all prophets and messengers, he said:

Know that God revealed to me and caused me to witness in a vision, which I received in Cordoba in 586, the sources of His messengers and all His prophets, from Adam to Muḥammad. None of this group spoke to me except for Hūd. He told me why they were gathered together. I saw that he was a very large man of good appearance, subtle in reply, gnostic in matters of unveiling *ma‘rifatul ghayb*. My proof of his unveiling is His words, "There is no moving creature which He does not control. My Lord’s way is straight” (11:56). What gift to creatures is greater than this? Then it is from the bestowal of favours on us by God that this speech reached us from Him in the Qur’ān (Ibn ‘Arabī, n.d, p.46).

It can be seen from the above that Ibn ‘Arabī has claimed that the Prophet Hūd spoke with him to prove his status in sainthood *walāya*. It is also noted that there could be an allusion to the similarity with the meeting that according to the Qur’ān happened with the Prophet Mohammed and the other prophets in *al-‘Isrā’ wal-Mi‘rāj*.

However, Mu‘ayyid al-Dīn al-Jundī in his commentary *sharḥ* of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and he is a direct disciple of Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Muḥammad b. Yūnus Qunyawī, who is considered the preeminent student of Ibn ‘Arabī has argued that the aim of the meeting between Ibn ‘Arabī and the prophets and messengers is to invest Ibn ‘Arabī as the seal of the saints *walāya*, and heir to the seal of the prophets (Mu‘ayyid, 2007, p.129). This is also found in ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī’s (d.1329) commentary (*sharḥ*) of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (al-Kāshānī, 2007, p.195). In addition to this, Qunyawī has claimed that “our *shaykh* Ibn ‘Arabī had the power to meet the spirit of any prophet or saint departed from this world” (Corbin, 2013, p.265).

According to the above discussion this belief was fully developed in the thirteenth century by Ibn ‘Arabī; starting with the Superiority of Khidr over Moses in the story, to the belief of the seal of the saints, and then dividing the prophecy into two parts. The first part is legislative prophethood (*nubuwwāt at-tashrī‘ī*), and the second part is general prophecy (*nubuwwh ‘āmma*). However, some would argue that this analysis still does not establish the potential of superiority of a saint over a prophet, as both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn ‘Arabī have not said explicitly that saints can be of higher rank than prophets although they argued that Khidr is more knowledgeable than Moses in the story. However, this is unlike what Ibn Taymīyah (d.1328) has understood, in fact, he is the first to have issued a strict criticism against such a belief. He understood that such a belief could mean that saints can be of higher rank than prophets and he mentioned both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, who established this belief and Ibn ‘Arabī, who developed it. Ibn Taymīyah has discussed this belief in his book entitled, *the Criterion between Allies of the Merciful & the Allies of the Devil* (n.d). The purpose of this book is to respond to the Sūfīs regarding the doctrine of the seal of the saints. As Ibn Taymīyah said, some Sūfīs, such as Ibn ‘Arabī, have claimed the status of seal of the saints for themselves or their *shaykhs*. This is in parallel to the seal of the prophets. Ibn Taymīyah said, “one group of Sūfīs believes that the “seal of the saints” is the best of the saints of God by analogy with the seal of the Prophets. No one of the early scholars ever spoke of this concept of a “seal of the sants” except for one man named al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (not the famous collector of Ḥadīth” (n.d, pp.62-63). Ibn Taymīyah has critiqued al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's book, *Khatm al-awliyā’ the seal of the saints* (1999), due to the many errors therein. One of which, according to Ibn Taymīyah, was to create the doctrine of the seal of the saints. He also criticized Ibn ‘Arabī, who followed al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in this belief. Ibn Taymīyah said:

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī wrote a book in which he made many mistakes, then, groups of Muslims in later generations believed this, each one imagining that he is the seal of the saints. Some of them even claim that the seal of the saints is superior to the seal of the Prophets in

terms of knowledge of God and that the Prophets benefit knowledge of God from The seal of the saints! Ibn ‘Arabī, the author of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* was one who imagined such things (n.d, p.62).

Ibn Taymīyah has understood that the comparison itself between the seal of the prophets and seal of the saints means that the latter is superior, and refers to the story of Khidr as the foundation of this belief. As a result, he argued that Moses is better than Khidr in stating that “it was said that Khidr was a prophet or a close friend of God (*walī*), but he was not a prophet. Rather the Israelite prophets who followed the Torah and were mentioned by God, such as Sulaymān, were superior to Khidr” (Ibn Taymīyah, n.d, p.321).

Ibn Taymīyah indicated that Moses is superior to Khidr, based on prophethood’s superiority to sainthood. Also, Khidr is not superior to other prophets of Israel, such as Sulaymān, who are themselves inferior to Moses according to the Qur’ān, (Q 4:164). Not only this but also according to Ibn Taymīyah, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb also have a higher rank than Khidr. Ibn Taymīyah argued that, “Khidr was not a prophet, so Abū Bakr and ‘Umar are superior to him” (Ibn Taymīyah, n.d, p.321).

Regarding Khidr’s knowledge Ibn Taymīyah admitted that Khidr is more knowledgeable than Moses in the Qur’ānic story. However, he argued that this does not mean that Khidr was superior to Moses by providing evidence from the Qur’ān to support his arguments. He said, “The fact that Khidr knew about issues that Moses was unaware of does not mean that he was superior to him in all aspects”. This is like when the Hoopoe said to the Prophet Sulaymān, “I have learned something you did not know” (Q 27:22), which did not mean that the Hoopoe was superior to Sulaymān (Ibn Taymīyah, n.d, p.321). In fact, there is nothing new in these evidence as they are the same evidences provided by the mystic al-Sarrāj as mentioned above (see page66). However, Ibn Taymīyah (n.d, p.321) does refer to new evidence which according to him proves that the

knowledge of Khidr does not mean Khidr had a higher rank than Moses. It is the story of the pollination of palm trees. It was narrated that Musa bin Ṭalḥah narrated that his father said:

I passed by some palm trees with the messenger of God and he saw some people pollinating the trees. He said: “What are these people doing?” They said: “They are taking something from the male part (of the plant) and putting it in the female part.” He said: “I do not think that this will do any good.” News of that reached them, so they stopped doing it, and their yield declined. News of that reached the Prophet and he said: “That was only my thought. If it will do any good, then do it. I am only a human being like you, and what I think may be right or wrong. But When I tell you: ‘God says’, I will never tell lies about God (Sunan Ibn Mājah. Vol. 3, Book 16. Ḥadīth 2470).

Ibn Taymīyah argued that the companions of Muḥammad had more knowledge of the benefits of pollination than Muḥammad in this story. However, this did not make them superior to him. Muḥammad said to them: “you know best about your worldly affairs, but when it comes to matters of your religion, then I am the one to whom you should refer” (Sunan Ibn Mājah. Book 16, Ḥadīth 2564). However, this analysis could be criticised in that there could be no relationship between the story of the pollination of the palm trees and Muḥammad, and the story of Moses and Khidr. The main reason for this is that the story of the pollination of the palm trees is related to worldly affairs, not matters of religious law, whereas the story of Moses and Khidr deals with matters of religious law. In fact, Ibn ‘Arabī has used the story of the pollination of the palm trees before Ibn Taymīyah to support his argument that prophets and messengers can see only from their message and prophethood through religious laws. This means, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, that prophets’ and messengers’ knowledge is only exoteric and limited to religious laws. Ibn ‘Arabī further argued how could this be different for other saints, who can see from both esoteric and exoteric knowledge, regarding both the religious laws and worldly affairs? He commented on the story of the pollination of the palm trees by saying:

Thus, the messengers, much as they are saints, see what we have mentioned only from the niche of the seal of the saints. How could it be different for other saints? Although the seal of the saints is subject to the judgement which the seal of the messengers brought through law *sharī'a* that does not diminish his station nor does it detract from what we have said, for something which is lower from one point of view can be higher from another (Ibn 'Arabī, n.d, p.12).

Ibn 'Arabī refers to the story of the pollination of the palm and Muḥammad as a confirmation of the difference between saints, who have esoteric knowledge, and Prophets, who only possess exoteric knowledge. He added, “Confirmation of this occurred in the history of our *sharī'a* in the story of the fertilization of the date-palms. It is not necessary that the perfect has precedence in everything and in every rank” (Ibn 'Arabī, n.d. p.12).

Ibn 'Arabī made a strong argument regarding the relationship between the story of Khidr and Moses, and the story of the pollination of the palm and Muḥammad, as the first relates to religious law and the second relates to worldly affairs, which are not equal. However, Ibn Taymīyah further argued that no one from the companions of the prophet has been referred to with *walāya*, or has been named by the seal of the saints. In other words, and according to Ibn Taymīyah this belief is completely unknown to the companions of the prophet who are considered to be his best followers²⁴.

The relationship here is that according to Ibn Taymīyah, no one can be a saint except by following Prophet Muḥammad. This may explain why Ibn Taymīyah connected this belief to the first

²⁴ The Prophet Muḥammad confirmed this by saying: “The best of my followers are those living in my generation (i.e. my contemporaries). And then those who will follow the latter `Imran added, I do not remember whether he mentioned two or three generations after his generation, then the Prophet added, 'There will come after you, people who will bear witness without being asked to do so, and will be treacherous and untrustworthy, and they will vow and never fulfil their vows, and fatness will appear among them’ (Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhī. Vol. 4, Book 9, Ḥadīth 2303 & Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d, p.62).

generation, who are the best followers of the prophet, because as mentioned, and according to Ibn Taymīyah, saints can only gain the benefit the knowledge of God via the prophets.

This is supported by the mystic al-Sirhindī (1624)²⁵ who has discussed this belief and argued that not only are prophets better than saints, but also the companies of the prophet such as Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb are also better than saints. Al-Sirhindī presents many reasons for this position. Firstly, one of the distinguishing features of the saints is that they follow the prophets. Second is that “prophecy is concerned exclusively with people, and therefore cannot be of the same value as sainthood, which aspires to experience the Ultimate Reality” (al-Sirhindī, 1974, p.191). He continues arguing that “such people believe sainthood to be inherently connected with the ascent, while prophecy comes into the picture only during the descent. Once it is understood, however, that both prophecy and sainthood participate in both phases of the spiritual journey, and that the achievements of prophecy in both are superior to those of sainthood, there can be no doubt as to the overall superiority of prophecy” (al-Sirhindī, 1974, p.191).

Despite that, al-Sirhindī does not refer to the story of Moses and Khidr as the evidence used for this belief, but he opens another problem in this regard when he argued that “in some partial aspect a saint may be superior to a prophet”. For example, *shuhadā’*²⁶ who according to al-Sirhindī have a higher rank than the prophets. Al-Sirhindī therefore "sees no harm in the words of Ibn ‘Arabī who said that "the seal of the prophets learns from the seal of sainthood" (Friedmann, 2002, p.51). In fact, Ibn ‘Arabī does not refer to *shuhadā’*, but he admits that saints have followed the prophets,

²⁵ Ahmad al-Fārūqī al-Sirhindī, was one of “the successors of the renewer of the Naqshbandi order, *Khawājā Muḥammad Baqī Naqshbandi Uwaysi* • • • He was knowledgeable and observant, a sea of divine secrets. He is the author of valuable books such as *al-Muntakhabat min al-maktubat* “(Friedmann, 2002).

²⁶ *Shuhadā’* mentions in the Qur’ān: (And whoever obeys Allāh and the messenger - those will be with the ones upon whom Allāh has bestowed favor of the prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous. And excellent are those as companions) (4:69).

but only regarding the esoteric knowledge. This is illustrated by the Ḥadīth of the Vision that is used, as previously mentioned, by Ibn ‘Arabī to distinguish between the seal of the prophets and the seal of the saints, the Ḥadīth is:

My similitude in comparison with the other Prophets before me is that of a man who has built a house nicely and beautifully, except for a place of one brick in a corner. The people go about it and wonder at its beauty, but say: 'Would that this brick is put in its place!' So, I am that brick, and I am the last of the Prophets (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Vol. 4, Book 56, Ḥadīth 735).

This Ḥadīth does not refer to the saints or their seal, which may have led Ibn Taymīyah to argue that the seal of the saints applied to the Prophet Muḥammad in the sense that he was the last of the prophets. However, this is unlike the argument presented in the recent scholarly work of Diego Sarrio (2011, p.282), who has argued that Ibn Taymīyah’s understanding of the seal of the saints was "applied to Muḥammad in the sense that he was the last of the Prophets". Sarrio went on to claim that “this was not” arguing that “the view of al-Tirmidhī, for whom the idea of ‘seal’ has to do with God perfecting prophethood (and sainthood) and placing his seal on it as a sign of protection against the prophet’s (and the friend’s) own carnal soul and the assaults of Satan” (al-Tirmidhī, 1999, p.101-7).

Sarrio's analysis does not consider why Ibn ‘Arabī used the Ḥadīth of the Vision, which is reserved for the seal of the prophets, in order to explain the status of the seal of the saints and to distinguish between the seal of the prophets and the seal of the saints, if there is no relationship between them. However, this was answered by Michel Chodkiewicz who has challenged the belief of the superiority of saints over prophets and argued that Ibn ‘Arabī does

not refer to this belief at all. Chodkiewicz also argued that scholars²⁷ should better understand Ibn 'Arabī's explanation in this Ḥadīth as the reason why Ibn 'Arabī sees two bricks as:

On the one hand, because outwardly he obeys the law brought by the seal of the messengers: this corresponds to the silver brick, which is symbolic of his outward form and also symbolizes that to which, in this form, he submits in matters of legal status. On the other hand, he derives directly from God, within his inmost self, the very thing of which outwardly speaking he is merely a follower. This is so because he perceives the true nature of the divine order of things and it cannot be otherwise. This is symbolized esoterically by the laying of the golden brick. For he draws from the same source that the angel draws from who brings the revelation to the messenger (1993, p.124).

In other words, according to Chodkiewicz there is no comparison in this Ḥadīth between the seal of saints and prophets in their status, as can be noted that the seal of the saints has followed the seal of the prophets in regard to the exoteric knowledge, this should mean that Ibn 'Arabī does not refer to the superiority of seal of the saints over the Prophets, as Ibn Taymīyah claimed. Therefore, according to Chodkiewicz scholars need to better understand both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn 'Arabī in this regard. A corroborating example of the correct understanding that he speaks of is al-Sarrāj who has argued against this belief, as mentioned above, and according to Chodkiewicz. Additionally, as previously mentioned, al-Sarrāj does not refer to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī by his name in his critique. However, there is another chapter in al-Sarrāj's same book *The Kitāb al-luma' fi'l- Taṣawwuf* devoted to explaining the miracles of the saints (*karāmāt al-awlāya*) where he criticizes those who have denied them. Chodkiewicz posits that this should be considered in

²⁷ He did not identify them, but I think he means Ibn Taymīyah, who is the first who has claimed to have understood this claim from the explanation of both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn 'Arabī. However, he has only discussed al-Sarrāj's arguments although he did not mention al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in his criticizes like Ibn Taymīyah.

evaluating al-Sarrāj's criticism as it is indirect criticism, and not accurate. This also leads to a discussion on the question of the intent of al-Sarrāj's criticism. Al-Sarrāj starts his criticism by saying, "Some assert that saintship is superior to prophecy...". One could agree with this argument to some extent, but should not forget that al-Sarrāj is considered almost contemporary to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, and this belief had just developed in the thirteenth century by Ibn 'Arabī, after al-Sarrāj's death. Otherwise, Chodkiewicz himself does not mention Ibn Taymīyah by name in his argument. This is despite the fact that Ibn Taymīyah was the first to claim that both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn 'Arabī had claimed that there is a superiority of the saints over the prophets, and Ibn Taymīyah mentioned them by their names.

To sum up, this section has discussed the possibility of the belief of the superiority of saints over prophets and its relationship to the story of Moses and Khidr. The discussion has gone through different stages starting with the mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d.900), who is considered the first to have established or introduced the theory of the seal of the saints *walāya* as a doctrine of the Sūfīs in his book *Khatm al-awliyā', the seal of the saints* (1999). The discussion moves on to identify how Sūfīs after al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī deal with this belief, and how it relates to the story of Khidr. The section also discusses how modern scholars have evaluated the discussion about this belief.

It is found that this belief had not been developed until the time of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī who is considered as the first to attain the secret of sainthood *walāya* because he passed the test or questionnaire that is presented by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in his book *Khatm al-awliyā'*. The test is probably the main reason why scholars have not engaged this belief till the time of Ibn 'Arabī, (d.1240) who was highly influenced by the belief of al-Tirmidhī.

While there is no explicit statement found in medieval Sūfī accounts saying that saints can be of a higher or superior to prophets, they have argued that Moses, who is a Prophet, was sent by God to

Khidr, who is a saint, in order to learn from him. This should mean that Khidr was more knowledgeable than Moses in the story. An implication of this is the possibility that saints can be higher and nearer to God than prophets. However, according to modern scholars such as Sarrio and Michel Chodkiewicz, who have engaged in some parts of this discussion, neither al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī nor Ibn ‘Arabī have referred to the superiority of the saints over prophets. They argued that there is, in fact, a misunderstanding between the explanation of both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn ‘Arabī and other scholars in this regard. Rather the main issue is the knowledge of Khidr, which will be discussed in the following section (Khidr: A Symbol of the Esoteric Knowledge).

3.3 Khidr: A Symbol of Esoteric Knowledge.

The Qur'ān has described him as a wise, knowledgeable and merciful person, which opens the way for reflection on the nature of Khidr, especially his knowledge. The Qur'ān (18:65) says (...found one of Our servants– a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own). Sūfīs have explained that the knowledge that is mentioned in this verse is esoteric or unseen knowledge or *'ilm ladunī*, which is bestowed to Khidr without an intermediary. This is considered as substantial evidence proving that, according to medieval Sūfīs, saints can be inspired with such knowledge without an intermediary as was Khidr, who is a saint. Furthermore, this was the reason for Moses' journey to seek Khidr, who has this kind of knowledge. Therefore, "Khidr come to symbolize a third path by which knowledge of God could be gained, giving man access to the divine mystery (*ghayb*) itself " (Massignon, & Mason, 1994, p.54). This is the issue of dispute among Islamic scholars that will be tackled and thoroughly analysed in this section by way of answering the following questions:

- 1) What is the knowledge that was bestowed upon Khidr?
- 2) Can it be inspired to others? In other words, is the verse Q 18:65 applicable only to Khidr, or can it be applied to other saints as well?

To answer these questions, several important medieval Sūfī scholars will be scanned. For example, al-Tustarī (d.896) will be discussed. He has argued that Khidr's knowledge is inspiration (*ilhām*), which is not limited to prophets and this means that it can be inspired to saints. According to al-Tustarī this can also be proved by the Qur'ān text where God says, "and your Lord revealed to the bees" (16:68) and "We revealed to the mother of Moses" (28:7) (Sands, 2006, p.83). This is also found in the account of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d.900) who has argued that "both saints and prophets had been granted a share in divine knowledge: The prophets in the form of 'divine speech' (*kalām*) and the saints in the form of 'supernatural speech'" (1996, pp.113-14). The term 'supernatural speech' means speech without an intermediary. This was also supported by al-

Qushayrī (d.1072), who illustrates Khidr's knowledge in terms of three different levels of knowledge: divine commandment, unveiling (*kashf*), and inspiration (*ilhām*). This takes place when al-Qushayrī attempts to explain the position of Moses, who could not understand Khidr's knowledge, because of Khidr's divine commandment. In other places he attempts to find an excuse for Moses who could not understand the knowledge of Khidr because he is working with unveiling (*Kashf*). However, when he interprets the verses which describe Khidr's knowledge, al-Qushayrī says it is a divine inspiration (*ilhām*). This may be due to his belief that there could be no difference between these levels of knowledge (1968, p.406). This may also be more prominent when al-Qushayrī claims that God has given this knowledge and compassion to Khidr for two reasons:

- To lead him to be the elect of the elect, which illustrates Khidr's strong relationship with God.
- Such knowledge can be transferred to another saint.

Also, al-Qushayrī (1968, p.406) describes Moses' knowledge by saying that the reason why Moses could not understand the actions was not due to his lack of knowledge but because he did not share this knowledge. This meaning can be found in the Ḥadīth text that has clarified both Khidr and Moses' knowledge when the Prophet Moses met Khidr, Khidr said to him:

I have some of the knowledge of God, which God has taught me and which you do not know, while you have some of the knowledge of God, which God has taught you and which I do not know (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 122 Book 3, Ḥadīth 64).

There is in fact, a treatise concerning this kind of knowledge written by Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d.1111) which is *al-Risālat al-Laduniyya* (1938). In this treatise al-Ghazālī (1938, p.366) attempted to distinguish between the revelation and inspiration by saying that "the inspiration follows upon revelation, for revelation is the clear manifestation of the divine command, and inspiration is the hinting thereat. The knowledge which is derived from

revelation is called prophetic knowledge, and that which is derived from inspiration is called knowledge from on high (*ladunnā*)". Therefore, "revelation is the adornment of the Prophets and inspiration the ornament of the saints". However, "revealed knowledge belongs exclusively to the apostles and ceased with them, and the knowledge from on high belongs to the prophets and the saints, as it did to Khidr". God said of him: "We had given knowledge of Our own"(18:65). Al-Ghazālī has divided divine knowledge into two types: first, there is revelational knowledge that is limited to the prophets, and no one can share in it including saints; second is inspirational knowledge which saints can share, as demonstrated with Khidr who is a saint and has such knowledge. The question that needs to be asked is how can such knowledge be gained without an intermediary?

In fact, there is a path used by Sūfīs to gain such knowledge, this path is the journey of sacrifice or perfection of man, and this may be why al-Ghazālī has argued that such knowledge is not limited to prophets, as it is considered as a God-gift behind this journey. This is confirmed by the mystic Maybudī, (d.1126) who succinctly describes Khidr's knowledge as the knowledge of the unseen, which for him is the God-gift behind this journey of sacrifice: "The secrets of the knowledge of the *ḥaqīqa* on his heart" (2014, p.475). He adds a description of both the knowledge itself and the one possessing such knowledge. The one who has inspirational knowledge is able to explain the inner and the true meaning of the texts, which is the nature of the hidden knowledge.

Related to the one who may have such knowledge, according to Maybudī, he "speaks of this knowledge is the realizer, who speaks from finding. Light is apparent from his words, familiarity on his face, and servanthood in his conduct" (2014, p.475). Maybudī, in fact, attempts to answer the question of how can the distinction be made between saints and others in relation to their knowledge? As Sūfīs believe that Khidr is a saint, and his knowledge can be transferred to other saints, he further posits that:

When someone is able to sacrifice his attributes to the holy *sharī'a* law, We will engrave the secrets of the knowledge of the *ḥaqīqa* on his heart: And we taught him knowledge from us." The one who speaks of this knowledge is the realizer, who speaks from finding. Light is apparent from his words, familiarity on his face, and servanthood in his conduct. A lightning flash of the Greatest Light has shone in his heart, the lamp of his recognition has been lit, and the unseen secrets have been unveiled to him. Such was Khidr in the work of the ship, the boy, and the wall (1993, p.475).

This may be the same as what Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.1210) attempts to illustrate in his *tafsīr* when he comes to explaining Khidr's knowledge; this is in the context of proving that Khidr is a saint and not a prophet. Al-Rāzī argued that such knowledge can be inspired by saints without an intermediary. He replied to those ²⁸ who argued that only prophets can gain this kind of knowledge by saying that "this deduction (*istidlāl*) is weak because different types of necessary knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-ḍarūriyya*) are obtained initially from God, but that does not indicate prophecy" (1995, p.150&Sands, 2006, p.84). This means that not only prophets can be bestowed such knowledge. Al-Rāzī (1995, p.150) also refers to the journey of sacrifice or perfection of man as a path to gain such knowledge. The same has also been confirmed by al-Kāshānī (d.1329) who argued that the knowledge of Khidr is considered "God-given universal realities without the medium of human instruction". This may mean that it can be transferred to the other saints but with the condition (*sharṭ al-'ilm*) that they must succeed in a journey of moral training (*ta'dīb*), which is the path to becoming the perfect man (al-Kāshānī, n.d, p.488).

²⁸ As will be mentioned, they are: 'Abd-ar-Raḥmān Ibn-'Alī Ibn al-Jauzī (d.1201) in his book *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb Talbīs Iblīs the Book of the Devil's Deception*, and Abu 'Abdullah al-Qurṭubī (d.1273) in his *tafsīr* and Ibn Taymīyah (d.1328).

It can be seen from the preceding statements that Sūfī scholars have classified the knowledge of Khidr as unseen or esoteric knowledge. Furthermore, saints have gained a spiritual level that allows them to receive knowledge directly from God. This spiritual path is achieved by worshipping God. It begins with worshipping God until they reach the highest spiritual level where they can establish a direct connection with God. This also means that it is possible for saints to be like Khidr in relation to his knowledge. This, as mentioned, is a contentious issue among scholars, in fact, there are critical responses found in ‘Abd-ar-Raḥmān Ibn-‘Alī Ibn al-Jauzī’s (d.1201) book *Kitāb Talbīs Iblīs the Book of the Devil’s Deception*, al-Qurṭubī’s (d.1273) *tafsīr* and the writings of Ibn Taymīyah (d.1328) as well. They have argued that such knowledge cannot be gained without an intermediary, because it is considered the only way to judge “whether the inspiration received is sound or merely a satanic suggestion” (Ibn al-Jauzī, 1936, pp. 393-403 & Sands, 2006, p.51). To be more precise, both Ibn al-Jauzī and Ibn Taymīyah have not denied the possibility of inspiration but they insist that the inspiration is “not knowledge in and of itself, but is rather the fruit of knowledge and piety” (Ibn al-Jauzī, 1936, pp.393-403 & Sands, 2006, p.51). This means that it cannot be gained except by following the teachings of the prophets, which establishes that there is an intermediary. They were concerned that this belief may lead to the idea that saints could do things that might be considered beyond the scope of religious laws, as with Khidr when he did not follow Moses’ message. Sūfīs do, in fact, believe that it is possible for saints to be like Khidr. al-Qurṭubī, (1980, p.40) has argued that “not only for believing that they could receive knowledge by any means other than the prophets but especially for claiming that this special knowledge frees them from the need to follow the religious law” (Sands, 2006, p.51). This means that the Sūfī might dispense with the messages of the prophets in some or all cases. In fact, according to Ibn al-Jauzī (1936, p.271), this is the case with Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī “when he criticized religious scholars, saying, “poor people! They get their knowledge from the dead, but we get our knowledge from the

Living One who never dies” (Sands, 2006, p.51). This is also the case with Aḥmad ibn Abū’l-Hawārī who:

Threw his books into the sea and said, “Yes, you were proof (*dalīl*), but devotion to proof after attainment (*wuṣūl*) is absurd.” Aḥmad ibn Abū’l-Hawārī had searched out *ḥadīth* for thirty years. When he attained all he could from them, he carried his books to the sea, submerged them and said, “O knowledge, I have not done this to you out of disdain, nor out of disdain for what is your due. Rather, I used to seek you out in order to be guided by you to my Lord. Now that I have been guided by you, I have no further need of you” (Ibn al-Jauzī, 1936, p. 274& Sands, 2006, p.51).

Sūfīs justify this by the division of the knowledge into esoteric knowledge, which is limited to saints, and exoteric knowledge, which can be known by both prophets and saints. This is rejected by both Ibn al-Jauzī and Ibn Taymīyah which according to them is considered another concern because if we assume that Khidr’s knowledge is esoteric, this should mean that Moses’ knowledge is exoteric, therefore, are they contradictory, or can inspiration contradict the revelation?

Because of this, Ibn Taymīyah (1987, p.85) argued that there could be nothing in the story of Khidr that proves that there is an unseen or esoteric knowledge that other people do not know. However, they are aware of the reasons that Moses did not share this knowledge. Khidr’s knowledge that the ship of poor people was headed for an unfair king and the wall that he built for the two orphans are examples of knowledge which others cannot know. According to the Ḥadīth text, Khidr said to Moses, "I have some of God's knowledge which He has bestowed upon me but you do not know it; and you too, have some of God's knowledge which He has bestowed upon you, but I do not know it" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Vol. 2, Book 21, Ḥadīth 263). This account shows that both Moses and Khidr have particular knowledge that the other one does not share. This seems to prove that

neither of them knows the unseen or esoteric knowledge, except what is bestowed on them by God. Therefore, how could Sūfīs have claimed that Khidr has known the esoteric knowledge, while at the same time Khidr himself admits that Moses has knowledge that he did not have or know? Some might argue that a weakness of this argument is that possessing unseen knowledge seems to mean knowing all of it or none of it. Surely it is possible that some of it can be known without all of it being known. This is true, but this still means that one cannot know unseen knowledge except for what is given by God. Therefore, this analysis according to Ibn Taymīyah supports the view that Khidr is a prophet, and the knowledge that is bestowed on him is simply a revelation from God, similar to other prophets and messengers. However, and as mentioned above al-Rāzī disagrees and argued that “This deduction (*istidlāl*) is weak”, as there is a necessary knowledge (*'ulūm kasbiyya*) which can be inspired to non-prophets without an intermediary. This kind of knowledge according to al-Rāzī (1995, p.150) can be acquired by two methods: one of them is called “consideration (*naẓar*), reflection (*tafakkur*), pondering (*tadabbur*), contemplation (*ta'ammul*), deliberation (*tarawwin*), and deduction (*istidlāl*)”. The other path is:

When a man strives by means of spiritual disciplines (*riyāḍāt*) and efforts (*mujāhadāt*) in which the sensual and imaginative faculties (*al-quwwat al-ḥissiyya wa'l-khayaliyya*) become weak. When they become weak the power of the rational faculty (*al-quwwat al-'aqliyya*) becomes strong and the divine lights shine in the substance of the intellect (*jawhar al-'aql*). Gnostic sciences (*ma'ārif*) are obtained and different types of knowledge (*'ulūm*) are perfected without the intermediary of effort or study in reflecting and contemplation. These are what are called the God-given types of knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-ḍarūriyya*)" (Sands, 2006, p.85).

According to al-Rāzī, it can be seen that *'ilm ladunī* is among the types of knowledge that are acquired (*'ulūm kasbiyya*), which would mean it is not limited to prophets on one hand and can be gained without an intermediary on the other hand. It can also be understood that al-Rāzī has

referred to the same path that is mentioned by al-Ghazālī and Maybudī for attaining such knowledge. Ibn Taymīyah has evaluated this path by saying that, Sūfīs argued that “it is possible for men who practice spiritual exercises, purification of the heart, and development of the soul by means of praiseworthy characteristics, to know this kind of knowledge”. In fact, Ibn Taymīyah admits that there is a relationship between practice and knowledge, which is unlike Ibn al-Jauzī, who has rejected “the entire notion of esoteric knowledge”. However, Ibn Taymīyah (1987, p.283) has argued that the theory of perfection that is employed by Sūfīs as a method to gain such knowledge is a philosophical theory. He argued that:

These philosophers said that the Angel *malāk* Jibra’īl was the imaginary vision which appeared in the mind of Muḥammad. Vision and imagination are products of and secondary to the intellect. Thus, the deviants came, those who shared with the philosophers this corrupt belief, and further believed themselves to be allies of God, and that the allies of God are superior to the prophets of God since they receive from God with no intermediary (Ibn Taymīyah, 1987, p.283).

At this point, the recent work of Kristin Zahra Sands (2006, p.85) has also engaged in the relevant discussion and supports Ibn Taymīyah’s argument that the theory of perfection is derived from philosophy. She states:

What is common to the theories presented by al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī here is the way in which they seek to confirm the possibility of individuals who are not Prophets acquiring God-given types of knowledge (*al-’ulūm al-ḍarūriyya*); this validation is accomplished by incorporating *’ilm ladunī* into existing philosophical and theological epistemological frameworks. Using the verse on Khidr’s knowledge as a proof-text.

However, this is unlike the recent research of Diego Sarrio who has referred to an important point in this context that is frequently found in Ibn Taymīyah's writings and it has not been

referenced by Kristin Sands. Sarrio argued that Ibn Taymīyah has contradicted himself regarding the relationship between the Sūfī method and philosophy. Ibn Taymīyah has mentioned in another place that “later philosophers, such as Ibn Sīna (Avicenna, d.1037), tried to reconcile Greek philosophy with the Prophetic message. They adopted some principles from the Islamic rationalist theologians and created a doctrine acceptable to the philosophers of the various religions” (Sarrio, 2011, p.284). It can be seen that Ibn Taymīyah has agreed that the philosophers have created an acceptable method, which is unlike what Ibn Taymīyah mentioned above. Therefore, Sarrio (2011, p.284) argued “this doctrine, however, contains a great deal of corruption and self-contradiction”. This also may explain why Sarrio evaluated Ibn Taymīyah’s conclusion that saints’ inspiration should be considered against the revelation. According to Sarrio (2011, p.284) this is because Ibn Taymīyah “was particularly concerned with what he saw as a prevalent mistake among his contemporaries, namely the blind acceptance of everything that the supposed friends of God said or did, even when it contradicted the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth”. In fact, even Sands who supports Ibn Taymīyah's argument, refers to such a point by saying that “although all the Sūfī commentators studied here understood *‘ilm ladunī* as a kind of knowledge that might be received by the rare individual, none of them addressed the issue of whether these individuals, like Khidr, are entitled or even obliged to follow a different set of rules than the common believer. But apparently, there were those who did propose such an argument” (Sands, 2006, p.86). This may have led to concern about this belief. Although Sarrio has made a strong argument in this regard, there remains a concern regarding how we can judge whether or not such knowledge that is gained without an intermediary is in line with the teachings of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth.

In fact, and to be more precise, those most influenced among Sūfīs by the knowledge of Khidr are the commentators of Qur’ān, as there is an individual method that is known as esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān, which will be tackled and thoroughly analysed in the next chapter.

To conclude, this section has discussed Khidr's knowledge and its relationship to saints. Most of the Sūfīs mentioned above have explained Khidr's knowledge as esoteric, which was bestowed to Khidr without an intermediary. Because of this, it is possible for saints to be like Khidr in regard to his knowledge. It is acquired knowledge that can be gained by "means of spiritual disciplines (*riyāḍāt*) and efforts (*mujāhadāt*)", which puts them on a spiritual level that allows them to receive knowledge directly from God. This spiritual path is achieved by worshipping God. It begins with worshipping God until they reach the highest spiritual level where they can establish a direct connection with God. It is "God-given without the medium of human intervention". However, a critical response is found against such belief with Sunni scholars that include Ibn al-Jauzī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Taymīyah. They have argued that such knowledge cannot be gained without an intermediary because this is considered the only way to judge this kind of knowledge.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Khidr's symbolism in medieval Sūfī beliefs, which is divided into 2 sections, which are:

- 1) Khidr: The Question of the Superiority of Saints Over Prophets.
- 2) Khidr: A Symbol of Esoteric Knowledge.

Section one was aimed to answer the question of how could Khidr teach the Prophet Moses knowledge that the latter did not know? Does this refer to Khidr having a higher rank than Moses? The discussion of the first section goes through different stages, it started with the mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 900) who is considered the first to introduce the belief of the seal of the saints as a doctrine to the Sūfīs, but as a technical term (*walī*) is mentioned in the Qur'ān text. The section then moved to identify how Sūfīs after al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī deal with this belief and how it relates to the story of Khidr. The next stage discussed how modern scholars have evaluated the discussion about this belief. The discussion shows that the question of the superiority of saints over prophets was discussed by many Sūfī scholars after al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, but they have not strongly been engaged with this belief, as they have briefly mentioned it in their books while even ignoring al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and his book, till the time of Ibn 'Arabī, (d. 1240) who fully developed this belief in the thirteenth century. However, the section concluded that this analysis still does not establish the possibility of superiority of a saint over a prophet, as both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn 'Arabī have not explicitly claimed that saints can be of a higher rank than prophets although they argued that Khidr is more knowledgeable than Moses in the story.

Section 2 aimed to answer the question of what is the knowledge that is bestowed on Khidr and can it be inspired to others? The section presented variety of Sūfī views in this regard. However, Most of the Sūfīs mentioned in this section have explained Khidr's knowledge as esoteric, which is bestowed to Khidr without an intermediary. The discussion showed that Sūfī seen Khidr as who

provides a point of direct transmission of the knowledge of God without an intermediary. This has led to raising a question of how we can evaluate such kind of knowledge that can be received without an intermediary, the discussion showed that Sūfī have affirmed the role of the spiritual guide in training the disciple to receive this knowledge, which understood from Khidr Moses relationship in the story. However, there is an important question which leaves unexplored by Sūfī commentaries in this regard: Did Moses succeed in learning Khidr's knowledge? And is Khidr successfully taught? In fact, and as mentioned that those most influenced by and employed such knowledge among Sūfīs are the Qur'ānic commentators. For this perspective, we will have to wait and look at these works to further examine such questions.

Chapter 4:

The symbolism of the Esoteric Knowledge in Sūfī exegesis: The Qur’ānic Story of Khidr as Model

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed that Sūfīs have explained Khidr’s knowledge as esoteric, which is bestowed to Khidr without an intermediary. It is acquired knowledge that can be gained by “disciplines (*riyāḍāt*) and efforts (*mujāhadāt*)”. However, the previous chapter concluded that those most influenced by and employed in the use of such knowledge among Sūfīs are the Qur’ānic commentators; as there is a unique method that is known as esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān. It is a synonym for the indicator method *ta’wīl* or the method of allusion (*ishāra*), the allegorical, which is attributed to Sūfīs who have claimed that God gives them special blessings which are not given to others (Sands, 2006, p. 94). This enables these people to interpret the Qur’ān in a different and unique way that other people have not thought of. This method of interpretation does not revoke the literal meaning of the verse; rather, it gives the verse a deeper, hidden interpretation. Sūfī exegetes have provided much more evidence in order to prove the validity of this method of interpretation; they have claimed that the first mention of this method is in the story of Moses and Khidr (Hixon, 2013, p. 10). This takes place when Khidr has committed three strange acts and gives Moses the esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of these events. Therefore, how did Sūfī exegesis read the story of Khidr and Moses, and what features of the knowledge of Khidr evoked responses from Sūfī commentators? This is the aim of this chapter which will be examined through providing the interpretation of the story itself as a model by three significant Sūfī medieval interpretations that give a unique account of the story of Khidr and offer different perceptions. They are: al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. 1126) *Kashf al-asrār wa-’uddat al-Abrār*, and al-Kāshānī (d. 1329), *Tafsīr al-Kāshānī*. I will treat these interpretations by

providing an extended analysis and interpretation of major themes within the texts. This chapter consists of three sections:

- 1) The definition of the Sūfī method of interpretation, and its relationship with the Qur'ānic story of Moses and Khidr.
- 2) The esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ānic story of Moses and Khidr by three medieval Sūfī interpretations.
- 3) A comparative analysis of the three medieval Sūfī interpretations mentioned in Section.

4.2 The definition of the Sūfī interpretation and its relationship with the knowledge of Khidr (the Esoteric Knowledge).

Several methods have been used in Islamic interpretations to understand the text of the Qur'ān and its meaning. The Qur'ān says: “We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Qur'ān: will anyone take heed?” (54:40). For example, Sunni interpretations have used two methods: The first is *Tafsīr bi' al-ma'thūr*, which includes interpretation by the Qur'ān itself, by the Ḥadīth, and by the first generation of the prophet (*al-sālaf al-ṣalīh*). The second is *tafsīr bil ra'yi al-maḥmūd*, which is based on opinions but must not contradict the first method— *Tafsīr bi' al-ma'thūr*. Sūfī interpretations have used another method known as esoteric interpretation or the method of allusion (*ishāra*). This method of interpretation is mainly based on the belief that the Qur'ān has an external and an inner aspect, exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*), respectively. It has an outside and an inside and its inside has another inside, up to a total of seven insides. The mystic Rūmī (d.1273) says:

Know that the Qur'ān's words have an outside and, under the outside, there is an inside, exceedingly powerful. And beneath that inside a third inside, in which all intellects become lost. The fourth inside of the Qur'ān none has perceived at all, expect God the peerless, the incomparable (1947, p.48).

The dimensions of this method are mainly being inspired by both the story of Moses and Khidr and the Ḥadīth, which is the source most frequently used by Sūfī exegetes to prove that there are many levels of meaning in the Qur'ān. According to this Ḥadīth, narrated by Ibn Mas'ud, the Prophet said:

No verse of the Qur'ān has been sent down except that it has an exterior (*ẓāhir*) and an interior (*bāṭin*), with every letter (*ḥarf*) having a limit (*ḥadd*), every limit a look-out point (*muṭṭala*) (al-Ṭabarī, 1959, p.12& Sands, 2006, p.12)

Another narration tells us:

The messenger of God said, “The Qur’ān was sent down in seven *ahruf*. Each *ḥarf* has a back (*ẓāhir*) and belly (*bāṭin*). Each *ḥarf* has a border (*ḥadd*) and each border has a lookout point (*muṭṭala*) (al-Ṭabarī, 1959, p.12 & Sands, 2006, p.13).

This Ḥadīth illustrates that every verse of the Qur’ān has an external and an inner aspect. Not only verses; each letter (*ḥarf*) also has multiple levels of meaning: *bāṭin* and *ẓāhir*. Abū Muḥammad Sāhl. Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 896), offers a commentary on this Ḥadīth in his interpretation *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, also known as *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, translated by Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeleris, which is considered the oldest Sūfī commentary to have used this method to explain the Qur’ān. He comments on this Ḥadīth by saying that:

Every verse of the Qur’ān has four kinds of meaning: an exoteric sense (*ẓāhir*), an inner sense (*bāṭin*), a limit (*ḥadd*), and a lookout point (*muṭṭala*). The exoteric sense is a recitation, the inner sense is understanding (*fahm*), the limit is what the verse permits and prohibits, and the lookout point is the elevated places of the heart (*qalb*) beholding intended by it as understood from God. The knowledge of the exoteric sense is public knowledge and the understanding of its inner sense and what was intended by it is private (*khāṣṣ*) (al-Tustarī, 2011, p.16&Sands, 2006, p.9).

Although al-Tustarī clarifies that the external sense (*ẓāhir*) is public knowledge, and the inner sense (*bāṭin*) is private (*khāṣṣ*), Sands, (Z, 2006, p.9) argued that al-Tustarī "does not specify in this passage as to exactly who possesses this public and private knowledge. Throughout his *tafsīr*, he uses the terms “elect” (*khuṣūṣ*) and common people (*‘umūm*) without saying what he means by this distinction". Sands, in fact, does not take into account that such terms usually refer to saints in Sūfī accounts (Mahmood, 1987, p, 640). However, Sands, (2006, p.9) refers to an important point, which is that the lookout point (*muṭṭala*) mentioned by al-Tustarī is “an overview from which one can understand what God meant by certain verses of the Qur’ān while still in this life”, which

contradicts what al-Ṭabarī understands where he argues that “a lookout point (*muṭṭala*) mean that each of the borders in which God has delineated the permitted and prohibited (and the rest of His revealed laws) has a measure of the rewards and punishments of God which will be seen and beheld in the Hereafter and met at the Resurrection” (1959, p.13&Sands, 2006, p.8). Although al-Ṭabarī agrees that the Qur’ān has also hidden meaning, *bāṭin*, his belief is that no one can know this until the Day of Resurrection. Therefore, according to al-Ṭabarī it is considered the knowledge of the unseen *‘ilm al-ghayb*.

In general, and according to the above Ḥadīth, the Qur’ān is considered with regard to its twofold meaning: exoteric and esoteric. The exoteric meaning (*ẓāhir*) discusses the literal meaning of the text, and the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*) or the method of allusion (*ishāra*) discusses the inner meaning of the text of the Qur’ān. However, the important question that needs to be asked in this regard is: Are they contradictory or congruous? Al-Ghazālī (1980, pp. 9-15) argued that “interpretation is essential for those verses of the Qur’ān and *aḥādīth* whose meaning, if taken literally, would be absurd” (Sands, 2006, p.56). However, Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn Taymīyah disagree with al-Ghazālī and insist that the literal meaning of the Qur’ān should not be abandoned but should go together with the exoteric meaning (Sands, 2006, p.56).

To be precise, this method of allusion (*ishāra*) has included two ways of understanding the text of the Qur’ān. Both discuss the inner meaning of the Qur’ānic text, but there is, in fact, a difference between them. One of them contradicts the conventional and literal meaning of the Qur’ān and does not pay attention to its context and the literal meaning. Those who use this way have claimed that this is the main purpose of the meaning of the Qur’ān, known as the method of allusion (*ishāra*) with an extra word (*bāṭanī*): (*al-Taḥsīn ishāra bāṭinī*). However, none of the Sūfī interpreters mentioned called themselves esotericists (*bāṭiniyya*), which is the name for those who reject the external aspect of the Qur’ān. Al-Kāshānī said that: “The Qur’ān’s exoteric sense (*ẓāhir*) is water which flows copiously and the thirst of their hearts is quenched by its inner sense (*bāṭin*) because

it is a surging sea. When they wish to dive in order to extract the pearls of its secrets the water crashes over them and they are submerged in its current” (n.d., p.3).

However, Sūfīs argued that the main way to understand the hidden meaning of the Qur’ān should be according to inspiration (*ilhām*). ‘Alā’ ud-Daula Simnānī (d.1336) said that “the commentator on the exoteric dimension of the Qur’ān should rely exclusively upon his external sense of hearing through which he learned the verses himself. The mystic should rely on inspiration (*ilhām*) to comment on the esoteric dimension” (Sands, 2006, p.11). This is supported by the claim that the first mention of such a method is found in the text of the Qur’ān within the story of Moses and Khidr (Hixon, 2013, p.10), which took place during their journey. Khidr performs three strange acts, and Moses asks him about these acts; Khidr gives Moses an esoteric explanation. The Qur’ān says (18:65) “found one of Our servants— a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own”. After Khidr explained all his actions, which had astonished Moses and made him question them, Khidr concluded that he had not done anything of his own accord, but had followed God’s instructions. The Qur’ān says, “I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience” (18:82).

Most medieval Sūfī interpreters such as Maybudī and al-Kāshānī have interpreted the case of Khidr who is considered by them to be a saint (*walī*) and to have the esoteric knowledge inspired in him by God without an intermediary. The Qur’ān (18:82) says “I did not do [these things] of my own accord”. This, they believe, enabled Khidr to explain the three actions by their deeper or inner meaning (al-Kāshānī, n.d, p.488-93), which illustrates the relationship between the Qur’ānic story of Khidr and this method of medieval Sūfī interpretation. Furthermore, medieval Sūfī interpreters have claimed that they gain Khidr’s knowledge in the same way in order to unveil the deeper and hidden meaning of Qur’ānic verses (Sands, 2006, p.94). They have explained Moses’ impatience with Khidr because Moses only had the exoteric knowledge, which is considered by medieval Sūfī interpretations as another method to understand the text of the Qur’ān. However, according to them,

this is not the main purpose of the text of the Qur'ān, a role that is fulfilled by the inner meaning or the hidden meaning, as exemplified by Khidr's knowledge. Nevertheless, and according to Ibn Taymīyah, there is the concern of how to evaluate and judge such knowledge? Ibn Taymīyah argued against "its reliance on subjective knowledge and consequent vulnerability to error" (Sands, 2006, p.137). Sands supports Ibn Taymīyah's view by saying that "it may be misunderstood by those who have not experienced a similar state, as well as by the interpreter himself if he misunderstands the nature of his own experience" (2006, p.137). Sands also refers to an important point in this regard that "the knowledge which comes to individuals directly from God is not necessarily beneficial to disclose, a fact illustrated in the story of Moses and Khidr: Khidr refuses to explain himself to Moses until they part" (2006, p.137). However, this was explained by Sūfīs as a map of the process of gaining such knowledge. In other words, this was understood by Sūfī interpreters as the master-disciple relationship, which is considered as a stage of the process of the journey of the perfect man, this knowledge, in fact, according to Sūfīs "cannot be taught but can only be obtained by the purification (*taṣfiya*) of the soul and the disengagement (*tajrīd*) of the heart from corporeal attachments. This process is illustrated by the allegorical interpretation of Khidr's actions" (Sands, 2006, p.94). The process of purification (*taṣfiya*) may be considered as an evaluation of the person who has such knowledge. It will be presented and analysed in both of the coming sections.

In conclusion, this section has discussed the definition of Sūfī Interpretation, and its relationship with the Qur'ānic story of Khidr. The first part of this section has shown that several methods of interpretation have been used in order to understand the meaning of the text of the Qur'ān. Sūfī interpretations have used a method known as esoteric interpretation, the method of allusion (*ishāra*). It discusses the inner meaning of the Qur'ānic text and does not usually contradict the conventional, and literal meaning of the Qur'ān. Sūfī exegetes have claimed that the first mention of this method is in the text of the Qur'ān within the story of Moses and Khidr. As three acts took

place during the meeting between Moses and Khidr who has the inner knowledge, which led him to explain his actions later on to Moses, who cannot understand them because Moses has the exoteric knowledge. Because of this, medieval Sūfī interpretations emphasize that the inner meaning, such as Khidr's knowledge, is one of the main ways to understand the Qur'ānic text, not only the exoteric meaning that was the extent of Moses' knowledge. Therefore, the story has not only validated the Sūfī method of interpretation but is also considered as a proof that the main purpose of the meaning of the Qur'ān is its inner meaning. It is also inferred from the story that such knowledge of a hidden meaning can be imparted based on the situation of Khidr, however, this kind of knowledge according to Sūfīs mentioned above "can only be obtained by the purification (*taṣfiya*) of the soul and the disengagement (*tajrīd*) of the heart from corporeal attachments. This process is illustrated by the allegorical interpretation of Khidr's actions." (Sands, 2006, p.94). This process of purification (*taṣfiya*) will be presented in both of the coming sections.

4.3 The esoteric interpretation of the story of Khidr

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this section will present three medieval Sūfī interpretations of the Qur'ānic story of Moses and Khidr (18:60-82): Abū'l-Qāṣim al-Qushayrī, Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī.

The main purpose of this section is to explore how the story of Khidr is interpreted by these three medieval Sūfī exegetes and the nature of the esoteric interpretation method. It also illustrates the intertextual relationship between these works.

We demonstrated in Chapter 2 that the text of the Ḥadīth has clarified and evaluated the Qur'ānic story of Khidr, including Khidr's knowledge and actions. However, it was noted that two medieval Sūfī interpreters, Maybudī and al-Kāshānī, have largely exceeded these Ḥadīth texts and interpreted Khidr's actions in different ways, which is the nature of their method of interpretation (the esoteric interpretation). Therefore, the actions are represented for them as stages in the path

of perfection. In fact, Moulay, in his article “*The Concept of the Perfection Man in the Sūfī Thought*”, has claimed that the first to introduce the theory of the path of perfection in Sūfī thought was Ibn ‘Arabī (Moulay, 2014, p.140). However, this theory has been found in an earlier account by al-Hallāj (d. 922), who died before Ibn ‘Arabī was born, so he was an early Sūfī who referred to the process of attaining perfection by explaining the reasons behind the events that are happening during the journey of Moses and Khidr (Sands, 2006, p.96). Therefore, this theory may have been introduced into Sūfī thought before Ibn ‘Arabī. This argument will also be presented in the comparative analysis section.

4.3.1 Al-Qushayrī’s interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr

Al-Qushayrī who is the oldest of those mentioned in this section starts his interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr by explaining about Moses’ servant, who is his companion and plays an important role with him in finding the servant of God, Khidr. The Qur’ān says: “Moses said to his servant, ‘I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years!’” (18 60:61). It can be noted that the Qur’ān does not define the name of the servant of Moses; rather, he is mentioned in the Ḥadīth text: “So Moses set out along with his [servant] boy, Yusha` bin Nūn” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123). The Qur’ān only describes him as a servant of Moses (*ṣuḥab*). This is because, according to al-Qushayrī: “When the companionship (*ṣuḥab*) of Yusha` bin Nūn with Moses was confirmed, then he deserved the title of *al-futuwwa* (noble servanthood)” (1968, p.406 & Halman, 2013, p.108).

Al-Qushayrī then refers to the fish, which according to the text of the Qur’ān was used as a marker for Moses to find Khidr. The Qur’ān says: “but when they reached the place where the two seas meet, they had forgotten all about their fish, which made its way into the sea and swam away” (18:61). Al-Qushayrī says that “God made the entrance of the fish into the water a marker (*‘alāma*) with which to find Khidr. There he made forgetfulness enter into both Moses and Joshua so that it

might extend (*ablughā*) the sign (*āyā*) and place it beyond human choice” (1968, p.406 & Halman, 2013, p.108).

Al-Qushayrī has also understood the following from verses (18:62): “They journeyed on, and then Moses said to his servant, ‘Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring’. The purpose of the journey of Moses is “moral training (*ta’dīb*)” because Moses wants to increase his knowledge. And this “State (*ḥāl*) of seeking knowledge is a state of moral training and a time of enduring (*taḥammul*) hardship. And for this reason, he was stricken by hunger” (al-Qushayrī, 1968, p.406& Halman, 2013, p.108).

Moses and his servant Yusha’ bin Nūn found Khidr in the place where they lost the fish, which is where the two seas meet. The Qur’ān says: “and found one of Our servants— a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own” (18:65).

It should be noted that the Qur’ān described Khidr as having been given mercy and knowledge by God. However, al-Qushayrī adds in this regard that: “When God designates a person as His servant, then it makes him among the elect of the elect (*jumla min khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*). When God said, ‘my servant (*‘abdī*)’ he indeed made him among the elect of the elect.” (Al-Qushayrī, 1968, p.407& Halman, 2013, p.108). This may indicate that Khidr has a higher rank and is nearer to God than the Prophet Moses, who is never described as my servant (*‘abdī*) in the story as well as in other verses mentioning Moses in the Qur’ān. Compassion, *Raḥma*, according to al-Qushayrī Khidr, was bestowed because “He (Khidr) will bestow this mercy upon God’s servants.” (1968, p.407& Halman, 2013, p.109). This may also indicate that this mercy can be transferred to other saints through Khidr. According to al-Qushayrī, Khidr’s knowledge is:

From the realm (*ladun*) of God, that which is acquired by way of (*bi-ṭarīqī*) divine inspiration (*ilhām*) without intentional effort. It is also said that it is that by which God (*al-ḥaqq*)—may He be glorified—makes known the elect from among His servants. It is said

that it is that by which, through its righteousness (*ṣalah*), God (*al-ḥaqq*) makes known His saints (*awliyā'*) from among His servants (al-Qushayrī, 1968, p.406& Halman, 2013, p.108).

In fact, al-Qushayrī reported these views about Khidr's knowledge impartially. However, my belief is that he tends to the last view as he believes that Khidr is a saint *walī*, not a prophet.

When Moses meets Khidr, he asks Khidr to follow him in order to learn the knowledge bestowed to Khidr by God. Al-Qushayrī describes Moses' request to follow Khidr as "Discretion (*talattūfa*) in his address by taking the way of asking permission. Then Moses openly explained his intention (*maqṣūd*) toward companionship (*ṣalah*)" (1968, p.407& Halman, 2013, p.110). The Qur'ān says (18:66) "... May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?" At this point, al-Qushayrī further analyses Khidr's knowledge which "Was not taught to him by a teacher, nor for a person" (1968, p.408& Halman, 2013, p.111). Al-Qushayrī asks the important question: How would he (Khidr) be able to teach this knowledge to another?

Al-Qushayrī illustrates the conversations between Moses and Khidr in the following verses:

Moses said to him, 'May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?' The man said, 'You will not be able to bear with me patiently. 68 How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?' Moses said, 'God willing, you will find me patient (18:67-69).

Al-Qushayrī concentrates on the master-disciple relationship when he attempts to explain this conversation: "The disciple (*murīd*) does not [have the right] to say "No" to his master (*shaykh*), nor the pupil (*tilmīdh*) to his teacher, nor the lay person to the learned jurisprudent (*al-'alim al-muftī*) in his rendering of legal determinations (*yafta'*) and judgments" (1968, p.409 & Halman, 2013, p.112).

Moses then meets Khidr where the two seas meet and, as mentioned, there are three main events during the meeting between Moses and Khidr. They are the ship, the boy, and the wall. With regard to the ship, the Qur'ān says: "They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, Moses said, 'How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!'" (18:71).

Al-Qushayrī explains this act by saying: "when they (Moses and Khidr) rode on the boat he (Khidr) damaged it". Despite Moses' promise to Khidr, mentioned in the above verse, that he would follow Khidr without asking questions, Moses disagreed with this act and asked Khidr about it. At this point, al-Qushayrī says that Moses "is looking at this from the point of view of knowledge. We are proceeding from the point of view of the divine commandment (*hukm*) (1968, p.409& Halman, 2013, p.112).

However, and according to the Qur'ānic text, Khidr was remonstrating with the Prophet Moses for not keeping his promise; Moses replied as the Qur'ān says, "'Forgive me for forgetting ...'" (18:73). Al-Qushayrī adds that "Khidr appeals to Moses with the stipulation of knowledge (*shart al-ilm*), because one who forgets is not held responsible (*taklif*)" (al-Qushayrī, 1968, p.410& Halman, 2013, p.112). In further analysis, the first excuse of the Prophet Moses was forgetfulness, which according to al-Qushayrī could comprise a situation where the believer is excused. The evidence that proves that forgetfulness is considered an excuse is the verse in which God says, "Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes." (Q2:286). There is also some evidence from the Ḥadīth text. It was narrated that: "The Prophet Muḥammad said: whoever makes a promise to someone, then forgets the promise or forgets to do it at the time stated, there is no sin on him" (Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Book 42, Ḥadīth 4977). It was also narrated by Ibn 'Abbās that the Prophet Muḥammad said, "God has forgiven my ummah for their mistakes, what they forget and what they are forced to do" (Sunan Ibn Mājah, Book 10, Ḥadīth 2043).

With regard to the second act (18:74), the boy who was killed by Khidr, Moses strongly disapproved of it; Moses found that Khidr apparently committed a criminal act. However, al-Qushayrī explained Moses' second protest by saying that:

It was in the nature of knowledge (*khulūq al-ʿilm*) and incumbent upon Moses. His shortcoming was inevitable: he sees injustice on the surface (*ẓāhir*). But, concerning that which he knew from the state of Khidr, it was within his right to stop until he had determined whether it was prohibited (*maḥẓūr*) or permissible (*mubāḥ*). It was the overturning of the norm (*qalaba al-ʿāda*) (1968, p.411 & Halman, 2013, p.112).

According to the Qurʾān, Khidr is also reprimanding Moses again for not keeping his word. Khidr repeated his statement: “Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?” (18:75). According to al-Qushayrī, this is because:

Moses stopped at the condition of knowledge (*shart al-ʿilm*). But on the contrary it has to do with the state of unveiling (*kashf*), so Moses imposed conditions on him. He said, “If I ask you anything after this, then do not keep companionship with me. You have received directly from me an excuse.” (18:76). He showed his disobedience three times. Since three is the outer limit of few and the inner limit of many, he could not find any kind of forgiveness after that (1968, p.412 & Halman, 2013, p.113).

Finally, with regard to the wall (Q 18:77), al-Qushayrī explained this action by saying:

It was incumbent upon the people of the village, based on their religious community (*milla*), that they should feed them [Moses and Khidr]. Moses did not know there would be no use in reproaching them. It would have been better had he disregarded it. So when Khidr raised their wall and did not ask for a reward (*ajr*), Moses did not tell him, “You have done something prohibited.” but he said to him, “If you had wished, you could have taken a reward.” That is, “If you Khidr do not take it for your sake, [then] if you were to take it for

our sake, your taking it would be better for us than leaving it. If they are entitled to their rights, then why did you forsake our rights? (1968, p.412& Halman, 2013, p.114).

4.3.2 Maybudī's interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr

Maybudī starts the interpretation of the story of Khidr by describing Moses' journey to Khidr as a journey of toil, discipline, and hardship (which had to be tolerated). According to Maybudī, the purpose of this journey was to rectify three issues: the soul, the disposition, and the heart. Also, according to Maybudī, the rectification of the soul has three stages: "Bringing it from complaint to gratitude, from heedlessness to wakefulness, and from foolishness to awareness" (Maybudī, 2014, p.474).

Rectifying the disposition also has three stages: "You come forth from annoyance to patience, from niggardliness to free giving, and from retribution to pardon." (Maybudī, A, 2014, vol.1, p.474). Rectifying the heart also has three stages: "You come forth from the ruins of feeling secure to fear, from the calamity of despair to the blessing of hope, and from the tribulation of the heart's scatteredness to the heart's freedom" (Maybudī, 2014, p.475).

According to Maybudī: "The material of this rectification is also threefold: the following knowledge, permitted food, and constant devotions. Its fruit is three things: a secret core adorned with awareness of the Patron, a spirit lit up with the love of eternity, and knowledge from God found without intermediary" (Maybudī, 2014, p.474). Because of this, Khidr is granted a gift from God: knowledge from God. The Qur'ān says: "We had given knowledge of Our own" (18:65). However, this also means that this knowledge is not limited to Khidr; anyone can gain this knowledge if he has not failed in the journey of toil, discipline, and tolerating hardship. Then, Maybudī gives more details about the God-gift behind this journey of sacrifice. That gift is the knowledge of the unseen:

When someone is able to sacrifice his attributes to the holy law *sharī'a*, We will engrave the secrets of the knowledge of the *ḥaqīqa* on his heart: And We taught him knowledge from Us.” The one who speaks of this knowledge is the realizer, who speaks from finding. Light is apparent from his words, familiarity on his face, and servanthood in his conduct. A lightning flash from the Greatest Light has shone in his heart, the lamp of his recognition has been lit, and the unseen secrets have been unveiled to him. Such was Khidr in the work of the ship, the boy, and the wall (Maybudī, 2014, p.475).

The relationship between Khidr and Moses is disputed among Islamic scholars. It is known that Moses was sent by God to Khidr in order to learn from him; leading to the claim in most medieval Sūfī interpretations that Khidr was more knowledgeable than Moses. However, Maybudī disagrees with this opinion and argues that, even so, Moses was sent to Khidr in order to learn from him. Nonetheless, according to Maybudī, God “made Khidr the furnace of Moses’ discipline.” He gave the following as an example: “When someone wants to take silver to pureness, he puts it in a fiery furnace. This is because of the superiority of silver over the fiery furnace, not because of the superiority of the fire and furnace over silver.” (Maybudī, 2014, p.475).

According to the text of the Qur’ān, Moses asked Khidr for permission to follow him in order to learn from his knowledge, but Khidr replied: “You will not be able to bear with me patiently.” (18:67). Maybudī analyzes this dialog by saying that:

The meaning according to true understanding is this allusion: O Moses, the secret core of your disposition so much expansiveness from the marks giving witness to the Divinity that you say, “My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!” [7:143]. I who am Khidr do not have the power and strength to pass these words over my heart or to busy my thoughts with them. Your ruling authority will not be able to put up with the grief of my deprivation. Surely, thou wilt not be able to bear patiently with me (Maybudī, 2014, p.476).

According to Maybudī, Moses meets Khidr and they journey together; three actions take place during their journey. Maybudī begins to explain the actions by focusing on the sea. The Qur’ān referred to this sea as *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, the junction where the two seas meet, which, according to the Qur’ān, is the place where Moses found Khidr. The Qur’ān says “And [mention] when Moses said to his servant, “I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years!” (18:60). Maybudī interprets the sea as the sea of recognition and describes it by saying: “Each of the one hundred and twenty-odd thousand center points of sinlessness dived into that sea with his community and people in the hope that from that sea they would gather the pearls of *tawhīd* in the skirt of seeking, for ‘He who recognizes himself has recognized his Lord’” (Maybudī, 2014, p.476). In other words, many people are seeking for this sea in order to meet Khidr, who can help them to have a good relationship with their God.

With regard to the first act, the ship, Maybudī analyzes this act by saying:

The ship is the ship of human nature. Khidr wanted to ruin and break that ship with the hand of tenderness, for the owners of the ship were “indigent” (*miskīn*), and their attribute was “tranquility” [*sakīna*]. The Court of Eternity had addressed them with these words: “He who made His tranquillity descend into the hearts of the believers” (48:4). When Muṣṭafā saw the Real’s self-disclosure of Majesty to the hearts of the indigent, he said, “O God, give me life as an indigent, give me death as an indigent, and muster me among the indigent!” When Khidr ruined the ship of mortal nature with the hand of tenderness, Moses saw that outwardly it was adorned and flourishing with the ornament of the law *sharī‘a* and the *ṭarīqa*. He said, “How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers?” (18:71). Khidr responded, “after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force (18:79): Behind its flourishing was a king, a Satan who had prepared the ambush of severity in the neighborhood of the ship so that he might take the ship with his severity and deception and travel in it by night and day, for “Satan runs in the

children of Adam like blood.” We took away this adornment and flourishing with the hand of tenderness so that, when Satan comes like a king, he will see it ruined outwardly, and he will not come near it (Maybudī, 2014, p.476).

With regard to the second action, the boy who was killed by Khidr, according to Maybudī this act is an allusion to:

The wishes and fancies that rear up their heads from a man’s makeup on the playing field of discipline and in the crucible of struggle. He said, “I have been commanded to strike off the head of everything not related to faith with the sword of jealousy. Once fancies mature, the result is that a man becomes a disbeliever in the *ṭarīqa*. In the world, I ambush them at the beginning of the road of disbelief so that they will return to their own measure (Maybudī, 2014, p.477).

As for the third action, the wall that Khidr repaired, according to Maybudī this act is an allusion to:

The serene soul. When he saw that it had become pure and cleansed in the crucible of struggle and was about to become nothing, he said, “O Moses, do not let it become nothing, for it is the rightful due of that Threshold to receive its service. Repairing its outwardness and taking into consideration its inwardness are obligatory for everyone. ‘Surely your soul has a rightful due against you.’ Beneath it has been placed the treasuries of the secrets of Eternity. If this wall of the soul is laid low, the lordly secrets will fall onto the plain, and every worthless nobody will crave them (Maybudī, 2014, p.477).

4.3.3 Al-Kāshānī's interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr

Al-Kāshānī starts his interpretation of the story by analysing the first conversation between Moses and his servant (Yusha' bin Nūn). The Qur'ān says: “I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years! (18:60). According to al-Kāshānī, the esoteric aspect of this conversation is:

Moses-the-Heart said to his lad the-Soul at the moment of its attachment to the body, ‘I will not give up; that is, I will not cease to march and journey. Or I will continue to march, until I have reached the juncture of the two seas, the meeting-point of the two worlds, the world of the spirit and the world of the body, which constitute the sweet and the salty within the form of mankind and at the station of the heart, though I march on for ages’—that is, [though] I march for a long time (al-Kāshānī, n.d, p.488).

Al-Kāshānī explained Khidr's knowledge as the knowledge of the unseen. This took place in verse (18:65) “and found one of Our servants— a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own” He says:

That is, spiritual perfection through disengagement from matter and sanctification from direction as well as pure luminosity, all of which are the effects of propinquity and withness, and We had taught him knowledge from Us, in the way of holy gnosis and God-given universal realities without the medium of human instruction (al-Kāshānī, n.d, p.488).

Al-Kāshānī, in his interpretation of the story, then pays more attention to the three acts during the meeting between Moses and Khidr. They represent for him the concept of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmel*), which has been considered as an evolutionary process of human beings. According to al-Kāshānī, the path of perfection starts when Moses and his servant are seeking Khidr; it is represented as a search for the holy intellect (*al-‘āql al-qudsī*) (n.d, pp.448-49). In other words, the process of seeking Khidr itself is considered as the first station of those who are seeking

God (attaining perfection). According to al-Kāshānī, this is a search for the holy intellect (*al-‘āql al-qudsī*), which is necessary and requires devotion to spiritual exercises until the soul is disengaged (*Mujarrad*) from the body. Only then can one become acquainted with the deeper realities (Pooya & Ali, 2004, p.93). This could be considered part of the *murid* (Rules of Discipleship)—how do we begin to cross these obstacles on the journey of seeking the path of perfection? (Ahmed, 2013, pp.4-18). In addition, disciples should not ask anything until the time comes and it will be explained by the master, *Sheikh*, even if the *Sheikh* does something that may be considered against religious laws. This concept is derived from the actions, events and dialogs that take place between Moses and Khidr. The Qur’ān says: “If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself” (Q18:70).

Al-Kāshānī, has interpreted this verse thus:

If you follow me in traveling the path of perfection, do not ask me anything—that is, you must practice emulation (*Iqtidā*) and follow the path by works (*a’ māl*), spiritual disciplines (*riyāḍāt*), moral traits (*akhlāq*), and struggles (*mujāhadāh*). Do not seek the realities (*haqā’iq*) and meanings (*ma’āni*) until the time comes and I myself mention it to you—that is, I will communicate that knowledge of unseen realities to you upon your disengagement (*tajarrud*) by means of transactions (*mu’āmalāt*) of the body and heart (al-Kāshānī, n.d, p.489).

However, there could be an inconsistency with this explanation for two reasons. The first is that Moses disagreed with what Khidr had done, twice, even though this is contrary to what was promised. The second is that such explanations tend to overlook the fact that Moses is considered one of the five greatest prophets and messengers in Islam. The Qur’ān says:

We took a solemn pledge from the prophets– from you [Muḥammad], from Noah, from Abraham, from Moses, from Jesus, son of Mary– We took a solemn pledge from all of them: (33:7).

Thus, and according to al-Kāshānī, it is likely that Moses has failed on this journey, because he disagreed with what Khidr had done, twice, and this would be against the infallibility of the prophets and messengers.

The second stage of the path of perfection according to al-Kāshānī is the destruction of the body; this is understood from the first act, which is the ship that was broken by Khidr, “representing the body (*badan*) in the sea of matter (*hayūlā*) traveling to God” (Pooya, 2004, p.93). “An alternate spelling is *al-hayūlā* an arabicized form of the Greek Hyle, the Materia Prima, which is an analog of *al-Habā*, especially in its secondary and cosmic aspect” (Burckhardt, 2008, p.60). This indicates the dissatisfaction of Moses when the ship was broken by Khidr. Al-Kāshānī states:

Did you make a hole in it to drown its people? That is, did you break it in order to drown (in the sea of primordial matter) the animal and vegetative faculties, so that it might perish? You have certainly done a dreadful thing: this denunciation is an expression of the manifestation of the soul with its attributes and the inclining of the heart of it and the dissatisfaction with being deprived of its shares during the act of [spiritual] disciplining and its lack of contentment with its duties (n.d, p.490).

The story mentions the poor people who were working in the sea: “the boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force” (18:79). Al-Kāshānī interpreted these people by saying:

It is also related that these [poor] were ten brothers, five of whom were chronically ill with the other five working at sea, which is itself an allusion to the [five] external senses and the

internal ones; and I wanted to make it defective, by means of spiritual disciplining, lest the-king-the-evil-commanding-soul should seize it by force. This was the king who was behind them—that is, in front of them—seizing every ship by force, by taking possession of it and using it for his own vain desires and pursuits (n.d, p.491).

It should be noted that the poor people who own this ship, according to al-Kāshānī said, were ten brothers who themselves were an allusion to the five external and five internal senses (*al-ḥawāss al-zāhira wa'l-bāṭina*). However, the key problem with this explanation is that there is not sufficient evidence to prove that the poor people who were working on the sea were ten brothers. The Qur'ān refers to them as poor people, as mentioned above, and does not mention how many (18:79) there were.

The second event of the story has two parts concerning the boy himself and his parents; both of them embody the third stage in the path of perfection, (*al-nafs al-ammāra*), and the soul at peace, (*al-nafs al-muṭma'innāh*). Al-Kāshānī said:

The youth Khidr kills also represents the commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammāra*) whose qualities of anger and passion veil the heart, his parents, the spirit (*rūḥ*) and his corporeal nature (*al-ṭabī'a al-jismāniyya*) (n.d, p.491 & Pooya, 2004, p.93).

God refers to this soul (*nafs*) in the story of the wife of al-'Azeez (*Zulaikha*) and the Prophet Yusuf:

I do not pretend to be blameless, for man's very soul incites him to evil unless my Lord shows mercy: He is most forgiving, most merciful (Q 12:53).

Sands points out that: "The commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammāra*) is that which leans towards the bodily nature (*al-ṭabī'a al-badaniyya*) and commands one to sensual pleasures and lusts and pulls the heart (*qalb*) in a downward direction" (2006, p.166).

The boy's parents represent the spirit (*rūḥ*) and the corporeal nature (*al-ṭabī'a al-badaniyya*), which will be consoled with the birth of a new child, the soul at peace (*al-naḥs al-muṭma'innah*) (al-Kāshānī, n.d, p.492& Sands, 2006, p.93). In other words, they represent the spirit (*rūḥ*) and the heart (*al-qalb*); this is because al-Kāshānī interprets them as meaning his father and grandfather, not the father and mother, and *al-naḥs al-muṭma'innah* means tranquil as it rests on the certitude of God. Ibn 'Abbās said, "It is the tranquil and believing soul." (al-Ṭabarī, 1959, p.53). God refers to this soul (*naḥs*): "[But] you, soul at peace: return to your Lord well pleased and well pleasing;" (Q89:27-29). According to Sands, (2006, p.166), the soul at peace (*al-naḥs al-muṭma'innah*) is that whose illumination has been perfected by the light of the heart so that it has lost its blameworthy qualities and become shaped by praiseworthy morals.

The third event of the story has three parts: the wall itself, the two orphans, and the treasure. All of these, according to al-Kāshānī, embodies the final stage of the path of perfection. Firstly, the wall that is about to fall down represents the soul at peace; al-Kāshānī, (n.d, p.493) says that:

The wall that was about to fall is the soul at peace (*al-naḥs al-muṭma'innah*) because it came into being after the killing of the commanding soul (*al-naḥs al-ammāra*), whose death was by means of spiritual discipline (*riyāḍā*). It became an inanimate object without movement of its soul or desire (*irāda*). Because of the intensity of its weakness, it was almost destroyed, so its state is expressed as being about to fall. His fixing it is its being altered by moral perfections and beautiful virtues by the light of the faculty of rationality (*al-quwwat al-nuṭqīyya*) until the virtues take the place of its vices (see also Sands, 2006, p.93).

However, Ibn 'Arabī (n.d, p.409) disagrees with him in his commentary. He says that this case represents the commanding soul (*al-naḥs al-ammāra*) because it is expressed as being about to fall, which is the situation of this type of soul as mentioned previously.

Secondly, according to al-Kāshānī (n.d, p.494), he classifies the two orphans, represented (*al- 'āqil al-naẓariyya wa'l- 'amaliyya*) as they are cut off from their parents who were believers, as either the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quḍus*) or the heart (*qalb*).

Thirdly, the treasure represents the prize given to the one who has achieved the path of perfection. Al-Kāshānī, (n.d, p.452) has claimed that: “The treasure is the knowledge that can only be obtained at the station (*māqam*) of the heart (*qalb*) because it is here where all of the particulars and universals are combined in actuality when perfection is achieved” (Sands, 2006, p.93).

The preceding section presented three medieval Sūfī interpretations of the story of Moses and Khidr. The section concentrated on the key issues in the story. However, there will be a full translation of the story in the Appendices.

The following section will analyse these works and demonstrate the relationship between them.

4.4 A Comparative Analysis of the Three Medieval Sūfī Interpretations

We have presented three medieval Sūfī interpretations discussing the Qur’ānic story of Moses and Khidr (18:60-82). In the following section we will analyse their interpretation of the story and discuss the relationships between these works, by focusing on three main themes:

- 1) The reasons for, and the purpose of, the journey.
- 2) The master-disciple relationship.
- 3) The three actions in the story.

4.4.1 The Reasons behind the Story

All of the aforementioned interpretations agree that the purpose and the reason for the journey is “moral training (*ta’dīb*)”. Moses was requested to increase his knowledge, and such situation according to al-Qushayrī requires (*taḥammul*) hardship. However, Maybudī, gives more details in this regard, as the purpose of this journey is to rectify three issues: the soul, the disposition, and

the heart. Because of this, according to Maybudī, Khidr is granted knowledge from God (2014, p.474). At this point, Maybudī refers to the theory of the perfection of man; according to both Maybudī and al-Kāshānī, there is a strong relationship between this theory and the actions of Khidr. It is of note that the three medieval Sūfīs mentioned previously derive the purpose of this journey from the Ḥadīth text, however, they have not referred to this. According to the Ḥadīth text, God sent Moses to Khidr because Moses did not attribute absolute knowledge to God. When he was asked by one of the sons of Israel to name the most knowledgeable one; he answered “I.” God admonished him because he did not attribute absolute knowledge to Him (God) (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Book 3, Ḥadīth 123).

4.4.2 The Master-disciple Relationship

The relationship between Khidr and Moses has been taken as a model and an example to demonstrate the master-disciple relationship in Sūfī belief. Sūfīs have explained the reasons behind this belief by saying that students should not doubt matters even if they think that it may be considered outwardly against religious laws. This is because Sūfī masters, *Sheikhs*, know secret, esoteric knowledge. Disciples should consider what had happened between Moses and Khidr, as Moses made a mistake by questioning Khidr, who was acting according to esoteric knowledge. Al-Qushayrī (d.1072) has confirmed this by saying that it is important for disciples to follow Sūfī masters, and they should not object to them as Moses did with Khidr (2007, p.521). Al-Qushayrī adds some details in this regard when he refers to the etiquette of Moses’ request to follow Khidr. This, as for al-Qushayrī, should be taken as a model of right conduct for the master-disciple relationship, rather than representing, as for al-Kāshānī, “The manifestation of the [spiritual] desire for wayfaring and the ascent to perfection” (Halman, 2013, p.108). Al-Qushayrī also gives more details about the master-disciple relationship when he attempts to explain the dialogs between Moses and Khidr. He emphasizes that students should follow their masters even if they see issues that may apparently go against the religious laws. This is an indication of the relationship between

esoteric and exoteric knowledge on one hand, and the path of perfection of man on the other hand. As for Maybudī, he refers to the master-disciple relationship by implication in his interpretation; this takes place when he says that God: “Made Khidr the furnace of Moses’ discipline” (2014, p.475). al-Kāshānī, who argued that all the story and its elements should be taken as rules of discipleship in their journey on the path of perfection, follows al-Qushayrī, who maintains that disciples should not ask any questions until the time comes for them to be explained by the master, *Sheikh*, which is considered the only reference by al-Qushayrī in relation to the theory of the path of perfection.

For further analysis, this event took place when Moses asked Khidr whether Moses could follow him, to learn from him. Khidr told Moses that Moses will not be patient, because Moses will not understand what Khidr will do. However, Moses insisted on following Khidr regardless of his warnings, so Khidr warned Moses not to do anything, or ask him about anything until Khidr explained it to him. There were three main events that happened during their journey, all of which Moses found objectionable. After the third event, Khidr said “this is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently” (Q 18:78).

Taking the above into consideration, it is noteworthy that the story was used as an example to illustrate the master-disciple relationship. This means “the master was a necessary component of discipline without asking questions or raising objections in his or her journey towards the truth” (Denny, Miles, Hallisey, & Waugh, 1998, p.18).

In fact, and as mentioned in the literature review, there is a recent book that discusses this belief written by Hugh Talat Halman (2013). The author argued that the story of Khidr has demonstrated the master-disciple relationship in Sūfī belief, and refers to a few numbers of modern scholars who have discussed this belief such as Shawkat Toorawa (2002), who has only argued in the beginning of his essay that the story is “influential in elaborations of the notion of the master-disciple

relationship in Sūfism” (p.45), and he does not provide any further details about this belief, which according to Halman (2013) is “essential to the transmission of the mystical heritage and practice of Sūfism”. However, Halman (2013) agreed that “we do find in the Ḥadīth an analogy drawn from the story to the desideratum of a scholar’s persistence in the pursuit of knowledge”, but in fact, there is not an explicit reference to the master-disciple relationship in the text of both Qur’ān and Ḥadīth. Even during the classical period this belief was not yet known. Perhaps according to Halman “the identification of Khidr as an exemplary teacher may have become established prior to classical Sūfism, but it is most fully developed in the medieval age”. However, Halman adds (2013) that, there are some motifs in the Ḥadīth text that can be taken as indicators of the master-disciple relationship. They are:

Moses’ journey with Khidr as a precedent for seeking knowledge with diligence and humility, also Moses’ journey teaches the importance of persevering in gaining knowledge and remembering that all knowledge belongs to God.

Another motif mentioned in the Ḥadīth is that: “Khidr is covered in a garment”. According to Halman (2013) “this motif of the garment (*thawb*) is adopted in Sūfī hagiography as the mantle of initiation (*khirqā*)”. Halman (2013) adds that this is especially so in the case of Ibn ‘Arabī, who considered the garment of Khidr (*khirqā*) to be mentoring companionship (*ṣuḥba*) itself. There are multiple relationships to this belief mentioned by Halman: the Ḥadīth’s indication of this belief, in addition to how Ibn ‘Arabī (2002, p.199) has linked this indication to this belief. However, this is unlike Ian Richard Netton (1992, pp.1-22) who has understood in that Ibn ‘Arabī has illustrated the relationship between Moses and Khidr in the story as a “mutual agreement, rather than failure on Moses’s’ part, should be construed to mean that while Khidr is the ‘Supreme Master’, Khidr and Moses were not engaged in a master-disciple relationship: ‘there is no Master/Pupil relationship here in Ibn ‘Arabī’s text in which Khidr is the Supreme Master”. Despite that Netton has clarified Ibn ‘Arabī’s explanation of this belief, but he refers

to an important point that Moses was not engaged in the master-disciple relationship in the story, as Moses has rejected the three actions that happened in the story, which would mean that Moses failed according to this belief. Therefore, how could the story demonstrate the master-disciple relationship? However, Halman (2013) has evaluated Netton's argument by saying that "mutuality" is only one aspect of Ibn 'Arabī's treatment of the relationship and the separation. An alternative reading of Ibn 'Arabī's discussion suggests that Khidr defers to Moses's status as apostle, out of respect for Moses's office, not as an endorsement of Moses's decision to affect their separation". This debate may be due to the fact that most attention to this belief is paid to Khidr as a teacher not Moses as a student. For example, the recent scholarship of Sara Sviri (1997) employs the qualities of Khidr in this regard in her own experience as a teacher, these qualities as she understood are "a merciful, nourishing benefactor" and a "ruthless, uncompromising demolisher of habits and thought forms" (p.36). She describes the teacher as both "undertaker and midwife" (p.33); "a reviver of dead souls and the destroyer of illusions" (p.35).

4.4.3 Khidr's Three Actions

The most noticeable point in al-Qushayrī's interpretation of Khidr's actions is the use of two levels of interpretation: esoteric and exoteric, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. This means he does not reject the literal meaning of the Qur'ān, at least on this point, which may make more sense in understanding Khidr's actions. This took place when he explained Moses' impatience with Khidr during the actions as Moses is "looking at this from the point of view of knowledge", which means Moses was working with the exoteric knowledge. However, this is unlike how both Maybudī and al-Kāshānī interpret the three actions, which are represented for them as a map of the concept of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmel*). As mentioned, the first to introduce this theory to medieval Sūfī thought is the early Sūfī mystic al-Hallāj. He refers to the process of attaining perfection not in the events themselves but when explaining the reasons behind the events that are happening during the

journey of Moses to Khidr. This took place by focusing on the exact wording in the narrative of the last part of the story, which switches from “I wanted” to “we wanted” to “your Lord wanted”. In other words, when Khidr explains why the ship was damaged, he uses a singular pronoun. “... So *I* knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force” (Q 18:79), and when the boy was killed, he uses a plural pronoun “...*WE* wished that their Lord should give them another child— purer and more compassionate— in his place” (Q 18:80). When the wall was repaired he uses a different pronoun: “*YOUR* Lord wanted.” “...so, your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord” (Q 18:82). Al-Ḥallāj explained these situations thus:

The first station (*māqam*) is the total mastery (*isīlā'*) of God (*al-ḥaqq*). The second station is a conversation with the servant. The third station is a return to the inner understanding (*bāṭin*) of [God's] supremacy in the outer world (*al-zāhir*) . . . because to get closer to something by means of egos (*nufus*) is to get farther away while to approach [the supremacy] by means of [the supremacy] it is to draw near (Sands, 2006, p.96).

In further analysis, al-Ḥallāj “seems to be describing here a change in awareness as the mystic draws nearer to God. Firstly, Khidr said, (I wanted), because he perceived the distance between himself and the all-powerful creator and therefore judged himself as a separate entity acting on his own volition” (Sands, 2006, p.96). In other words, it can be said that al-Ḥallāj refers here to the process of attaining perfection—that is, the use of the term *māqam* (spiritual station), which is used by Sūfīs to refer to stages or degrees along the path to illumination. The goal of the path is the personal experience of divine reality. The *māqam* is “a stage that can be achieved through human effort, as opposed to Hal (grace), which is a gift from God” (Esposito, 2003, p.191). The stages are to be achieved through the guidance and authority of a master, *Shaikh*. The latter can reach up to the stage of Khidr through the process of attaining perfection, for it is a question of

replicating a relationship that originated with the prophets and the saints, who teach by example (Benaissa, 2005, pp.67-97).

However, Pooya, (& Ali, 2004, p.173) disagrees with this interpretation; he argues that the reason for taking the responsibility of damaging the boat in verse 18:79 is, as a matter of courtesy, to not attribute such an act to God. In other words, in the first situation, Khidr attributed it to himself as the causative agent, as the act of marring could not be attributed to God despite the command being from God. In relation to this, it can also be found in the Qur'ān that the Prophet Ibrahim also employs this style of speech. The Qur'ān says (26:78-80) “who created me. It is He who guides me; He who gives me food and drink; He who cures me when I am ill”. This verse illustrates that Ibrahim attributes sickness to himself and healing to God. Therefore, it seems to be the appropriate interpretation of this action.

In the second situation, which took place when Khidr said: “We wanted,” al-Ḥallāj identifies this as a partnership in action between God and Khidr, which may be far removed from the Qur'ānic text. It is almost certain from the Islamic perspective that no one can participate with God. Thus, Sands, (2006, p.95) holds the view that: “When Khidr said, (we wanted), al-Ḥallāj has claimed that there is an intimate conversation between Khidr and his Lord, indicating a kind of partnership in action; but this was also an illusion which kept him from true nearness”. However, if al-Ḥallāj means that the partnership between God and Khidr is not in the action itself but because Khidr was applying the commands of God, that would be acceptable. Accordingly, Pooya (& Ali, 2004, p.73) suggests: “In verse 18:81 the slaying of the boy deprived him of his life, but it was a service to his parents, therefore ‘we’ is used. The deprivation refers to Khidr and the advantage refers to God”. In other words, when explaining both aspects of ‘we’, God and Khidr, the killing was commanded by God and carried out by Khidr, so ‘we’ is used. A serious weakness in this argument, however, when Pooya says that the deprivation refers to Khidr, lies in what the actual meaning of ‘deprivation’ is and how it is used here. Maybe he thought that the killing itself is a negative matter

or he realized that the killing is extremely difficult to talk about. However, the killing was intended and commanded by God and was performed by Khidr.

In the last situation, when Khidr said according to the Qur'ān “Your Lord wanted,” al-Ḥallāj explained it thus: “Khidr returned to the awareness of God’s omnipotence, achieving true intimacy by recognizing the secret of his pervasive agency and allowing his own ego to be eclipsed” (Sands, 2006, p.96). One explanation for this might be that it will be unseen by Khidr. In other words, Khidr will not witness how the orphans get their treasure in the future, in contrast to the previous actions that are witnessed by Khidr (Pooya, & Ali, 2004, pp.173-74). Therefore, he attributed this action to God.

It can be argued from this analysis that the theory of attaining perfection was introduced to the Sūfī account by the mystic al-Ḥallāj. However, al-Ḥallāj has connected this theory with the last part of the story of Khidr and concentrates more on the relationship between God and Khidr than that between Moses and Khidr; it may be because of his beliefs that Moses failed in this journey. This contrasts with al-Qushayrī, who does not refer to this belief in interpreting the story, although he does use allegorical interpretation. As for Maybudī and al-Kāshānī, both, in fact, follow the ideas of al-Ḥallāj in connecting the events of Khidr with this theory, but in the events, themselves, they have added extra information. This can be shown as follows:

According to Maybudī, the story’s elements (such as characters and events) have been used “As symbolic indicators of the stages of the soul in its progress towards attaining knowledge of higher realities” (Sands, 2006, p.91). The first action, the boat, represents “The poverty that one must embrace in order to escape the notice of Satan who is attracted to prosperity and the outward display of one’s religion.” (Sands, 2006, p.91). The second action, the boy who is killed by Khidr, refers to “The desires and opinions that rear their heads in the field of spiritual discipline (*riyāḍa*), and the struggle (*mujāhada*) that must be cut off because this (offspring) will become a disbeliever

as it grows” (Sands, 2006, p.91). The last action, the wall rebuilt by Khidr, is “an allusion to the soul at peace (*al-naḥs al-muṭma’innah*) that must not be destroyed. The purpose of the spiritual effort is to purify the soul, not annihilate it, for the Prophet said, “Your soul has a right over you” (Sands, 2006, p.91).

As for al-Kāshānī, the process of attaining perfection goes through three stages. The first stage is the inner journey to gain knowledge and understanding of the secrets of the unseen world, which corresponds to Moses’ journey in search of Khidr, which in turn represents the seeker of spiritual reality. The second stage represents the destruction of the body, which refers to revealing the unseen. Ibn ‘Arabī (n.d, p.223) states that the ship is your soul, and you should be pierced by effort (*majahūd*) to join your separate souls with the united single divine soul; the body then becomes a metaphor for the truth. It should be noted that he refers to the ship that is broken by Khidr. The third stage is the wall that was rebuilt by Khidr, which represents reaching the stage of the unveiling (*Kashf*).

It is worth saying here that this explains al-Kāshānī’s belief that Khidr is a holy being, and receives inspiration directly from God without mediation, which leads him to know esoteric knowledge. This inspiration is understood as a kind of revelation (*waḥī*) that is not restricted to the prophets and symbolized by the saints, *al-walāya*. According to this, religious laws have separated between the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and exterior (*ẓāhir*) interpretation, where Khidr represented the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and the Prophet Moses represented the exterior (*ẓāhir*). Therefore, every Qur’ānic verse (according to them) has two meanings: the exoteric, for oral recitation, and the esoteric, for interior comprehension (Elias, 2010, p.42).

On the one hand, this analysis demonstrates the relationship between the Sūfī method of interpretation and the story of Khidr; on the other hand it presents a sample of this technique of Sūfī interpretation, which is entirely inconsistent with the exoteric interpretation. It should also be

noted that there is an inconsistency in the way the aforementioned interpretations use this method, at least when it comes to explaining Khidr's actions. This shows that both Maybudī and al-Kāshānī have exclusively used allegory to interpret the actions in the story. This is in contrast to al-Qushayrī, who uses both exoteric and esoteric interpretations to deal with the actions. There are similarities between the interpretations of Maybudī and al-Kāshānī, but Maybudī is considered more cautious when it comes to emphasizing the role of the Sūfī master in the process of attaining perfection. There is a difference, in relation to the process of attaining perfection described in the story, between both Maybudī and al-Kāshānī. For example, Maybudī interprets the sea as the sea of recognition and describes it by saying: "Each of the one hundred and twenty-odd thousand center points of sinlessness dived into that sea with his community and people in the hope that from that sea they would gather the pearls of *tawḥīd* in the skirt of seeking," for "He who recognizes himself has recognized his Lord" (2014, p.476). As for al-Kāshānī, he refers to: "The meeting-point of the two worlds, the world of the spirit and the world of the body, which constitute the sweet and the salty within the form of mankind and at the station of the heart, though I march on for ages,'—that is, [though] I march for a long time" (n.d, p.488).

The relationship between the terminology and concepts used to explain this theory and the writing of Ibn Sina (d.1037) (Avicenna) might be clearer now. This argument as mentioned is supported by Sands, who attempts to compare both Maybudī and al-Kāshānī in their methods of interpretation in her book *Sūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*. Sands concludes his comparison by saying that: "... Also distinctive is the way in which he combines the terminology and concepts taken from the writings of Ibn Sina with those of the Sūfīs" (2006, p.91). This similarity can also be noted in the sayings of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), who understood the human soul as:

Comprised of three parts: the vegetative (*nabatī*) or natural (*ṭabī'ī*) soul, which governs the natural processes of the body; the animal (*ḥayawānī*) soul, which governs instinctive and voluntary movement, the latter being based on desire or anger, and perception through the

five external and five internal senses; and the rational (*nāṭiqā*) soul, unique to man, which is made up of the practical (‘*amalī*) and theoretical (*naẓarī*) intellects which enable men to seek moral and intellectual perfection (Heath, 1992, p.60)

Ibn Sina also adds:

The rational soul is made up of the practical and theoretical faculties or intellects. The practical intellect mediates between the vegetal and animal souls and the theoretical intellect, using the rationality of the latter to control the appetites and passions of the former by fostering ethical behavior. The practical intellect deals with the particulars of the external material world while the theoretical intellect has the potential to understand universal concepts received from the Active Intelligence (‘*al-aql al-fa‘āl*), either through a slow process of applied logic or immediate intuition (*hads*), a potential which may or may not be actualized (see also Sands, 2006, p.166).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the symbolism of Esoteric Knowledge in Sūfī exegesis: The Qur’ānic Story of Khidr as a Model, in three sections:

- 1) The definition of the Sūfī interpretation and its relationship with the knowledge of Khidr (the Esoteric Knowledge).
- 2) The esoteric interpretation of the story of Khidr.
- 3) A comparative analysis of the exoteric and esoteric interpretation of the story of Khidr.

Section 1 has shown that Sūfī method of interpretation is known as esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān. It is a synonym for the indicator method, *ta’wīl* or *al-tafsīr al-‘ashri*, also allegorical, which is attributed to Sūfīs who have claimed that God in return gives them special blessings which are not given to others (Sands, 2006, p.94). This enables the Sūfīs to interpret the Qur’ān in a different and unique way that other people have not thought of. This method discusses the inner

meaning of the text of the Qur'ān and is mainly based on the belief that the Qur'ān has an external and an inner aspect, exoteric *ẓāhir*, and esoteric *bāṭin*. It has an outside and an inside and its inside has another inside, up to a total of seven insides. The dimensions of this method are mainly inspired by both the story of Moses and Khidr and the Ḥadīth, which is the source most frequently used by Sūfī exegetes to support their method.

The section also told us that *Tafsīr al-Tustarī* is considered the oldest Sūfī commentary to have used the method of allusion (*ishāra*), and *Tafsīr al-Kāshānī*, is considered the last Sūfī interpretation to have used this method in the middle ages. With regard to the second part of this section, the relationship between the medieval method of interpretation and the story of Khidr has shown that, according to medieval Sūfī interpretations, the first mention of this method found in the text of the Qur'ān is in the story of Moses and Khidr.

Section 2 of this chapter presented three medieval Sūfī interpreters of the Qur'ānic story of Moses and Khidr: Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī. Next, Section 3 involved a comparative analysis of the three medieval Sūfī interpretations. This section analysed the three interpretations of the story and discussed the relationships between these works by focusing on three main themes:

- The reasons for, and the purpose of, the journey.
- The master-disciple relationship.
- The three actions that take place in the story.

This section aimed to answer the question of how Sūfī exegesis read the story of Khidr and Moses, and what features of the knowledge of Khidr evoked responses from Sūfī commentators?

All of the aforementioned interpretations agree that the purpose of the journey is for “moral training (*ta'dīb*)”. With regard to the master-disciple relationship, al-Kāshānī was a follower of

the ideas of both al-Qushayrī and Maybudī. In addition, the discussion shows that the master-disciple relationship may have become established in the classical period but was only developed in the Medieval Age. This might be due to the lack of existence of an explicit reference to the master-disciple relationship in the text of both Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. Whereas there is an analogy to this belief in the Ḥadīth, there is still a problem with it. The problematic issue is the nature of the Prophet Moses who is, according to this belief, unsuccessful as a disciple in the story.

The last part of this section, Khidr's Acts, shows that revoking the literal meaning of the Qur'ān includes the Ḥadīth text in some cases (for example, medieval Sūfīs such as Maybudī and al-Kāshānī); this probably leads to their borrowing philosophical theory, terminology, and concepts in order to explain the text of the Qur'ānic story of Khidr, and to their approach being regarded as having more to do with philosophy than Sūfism. Otherwise, they have not referred to some important issues associated with Khidr and discussed in Chapter 1, such as the nature of Khidr and the water of life, although their belief is that Khidr is still alive, and a saint, *walī*.

However, Sūfī commentators have found in the story of Moses and Khidr the ground for developing some perspectives: for example, a subtle inner level of meaning which according to them provides much more details in understanding the meaning of the text of the Qur'ān, and the belief of the master-disciple relationship.

Chapter 5:

Khidr's Symbolism in Medieval Sūfī Literature

5.1 Introduction

The popularity of Khidr in religion has made him the subject of discussion in literature and in literary works. Khidr is considered one of those figures about which religious thinking has mixed with folklore and legend. This intermingling has led to this figure being a permanent presence in religion, literature and critical heritage, as well as in folklore. This has been confirmed by the recent scholarship of Omar who said that the figure of Khidr has “travelled far and beyond the geographical as well as ideological boundaries of its origin. The legend has truly lived up to its universal quality as it spreads across a variety of cultures and civilizations around the world” (1993, p. 290).

Taking into consideration that Khidr, the one who has drunk from the spring of life/eternity, has become a point of concurrency between religions and writers, but with variant names and dates, there is almost unanimity on his attributes and roles. This may be what ensured his popularity in literature and criticism as an infinite resource with the potential for unlimited creative views. This is due to the story of Moses and Khidr being “full of imagery and divine allusions. First of all, there is a mention of the fish, which is a symbol of knowledge; then there is mention of water, a symbol of life; as well as the sea, symbolizing the limitless immensity and vastness of knowledge, especially esoteric knowledge” (Omar, 1993, p.290). Therefore, Sūfī literature has never stopped representing Khidr, and to fully understand the representation of Khidr in variety of medieval Sūfīs schools, this chapter explore the impact of Khidr on medieval Sūfī literature, in addition to the broader literary impact of Sūfī heritage during and after that period in an effort to answer the question of Khidr's place within this tradition. This will be conducted through focusing on two sections: 1) Khidr Symbolism in Sūfī Poetry; 2) Khidr Symbolism in Sūfī Prose

5.2 Khidr symbolism in Sūfī Poetry

The figure of Khidr has, in fact, a large presence in Arabic poetry where hundreds of poetic verses mention Khidr, either describing his meeting with Moses, the water of life, esoteric knowledge or other imagery. The first sign of Khidr may be found in the Umayyad poet Qays Ibn al-Mulawwah's poem (d.687), later known as "*Possessed by Madness for Laylā*" (*Majnūn Laylā*), which probably was the first poem to mention Khidr (Muhammad, 2012, p.109). The figure of Khidr and his story's elements are frequently mentioned among medieval Sūfī poets, however, and as mentioned in the literature review, this section will be centered upon three major medieval Sūfī poets: Aṭṭār (d. 1222), Rūmī (d. 1237) and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240).

5.2.1 Aṭṭār. Abū Ḥamīd bin Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm Farīd al-dīn

Khidr has been found in different places in the account of Aṭṭār; including two famous epics: *Ilāhī-Nāma* (*Book of the Divine*) and *Manṭiq-ut-Ṭayr* (*Conference of the Birds*):

5.2.1.1 *Ilāhī-Nāma* or, Book of God

The context of *Ilāhī-Nāma* (*Book of the Divine*) is mainly focused on conversations or dialogues that happen between the Caliph and his six sons. The Caliph has asked each one of them about his heart's desire: "the first son longs for the daughter of the king of the fairies, the second for mastery of the art of magic, the third for the *Jām-e jam*, the world-reflecting cup of Jamšīd, the fourth for the water of life, the fifth for the demon-controlling ring of Solomon, and sixth for knowledge of alchemy" (Reinert, 2012, pp.20-25).

The poet has made the heroes of this epic who are embodied in the Caliph and his six sons as symbols of the conflict between the soul and its desires. In addition, the role of the Caliph is that of a master (*Murshid*), who is seeking to change the physical desires to spiritual desires.

The ruler discusses each son's desire with him, trying to explain to him not only that it is absurd if viewed sub specie aeternitatis, but that it may also, if interpreted esoterically, have a deeper meaning and be capable of fulfillment within himself. The fairy princess maybe

one's own purified soul, magic may consist of turning the devil which one carries in one's self into a Muslim. Jamšīd's cup may be the mystic who in the state of union becomes the mirror of reality, the water of life may be esoteric knowledge, Solomon's ring may be contentment with one's lot, and the true elixir may, in 'Aṭṭār's words, be the "light of God" which transforms everything (Reinert, 2012, pp.20-25).

Three poems related to Khidr are mentioned in *Ilāhī-Nāma* (*Book of the Divine*), all of which are in the context of the reply to the fourth son who asked, as mentioned, about the water of life, which is one of the story's elements. The poems are:

- 1) In Praise of the Prophet
- 2) Invocation of the Spirit
- 3) Story of the Virtuous Woman Whose Husband Had Gone on a Journey.

5.2.1.2 In Praise of the Prophet:

Aṭṭār says (*Ilāhī-Nāma*, 2011, p. 20):

... Jacob was filled with grief in his longing for you; it was in search of

You that he withdrew into solitude.

Joseph escaped from prison and the well and with a hundred kinds of

Beauty sought a share of yours.

The noble Khidr waters the end of your street from his fountain...

In this verse, Aṭṭār praises the Prophet Mohammed, and illustrates how other prophets and saints are lower in status than him. Aṭṭār refers to Khidr as one of the saints who "waters the end of your (Muḥammad's) street from his fountain". Aṭṭār refers to the water of life, which, according to Sūfis, was discovered by Khidr. This may indicate two things: The first is the relationship between Khidr and the other prophets, particularly Prophet Muḥammad. As the verse shows, Khidr was lower than the Prophet, and is ready to give him the water of life, which represents immortality. Second,

the poet illustrates the water of life itself. As it is a gift from God to Khidr, it also represents the esoteric knowledge as it specifically relates to Khidr. This can be proven from the context, where Aṭṭār mentions all the prophets with their abilities or gifts that are bestowed on them by God. The poem demonstrates Khidr's dignity on one hand, and his relationship with other prophets on the other hand. Khidr's gift, according to Aṭṭār, can be also transferred to other saints in the path of perfection but in this time by the meeting with Khidr, this also illustrates in the following poem.

5.2.1.3 Invocation of the Spirit

Aṭṭār says (Ilāhī-Nāma, 2011, p.31):

**... Like Khidr set your foot upon the road of the saints, so that the circling
Heavens may not overtake you.
Your place, O highest leader, is Noah's ark, and your time the Forenoon
And the Night of Power...**

The poet in these verses talks to the spirit in a rhetorical and impassioned way. He represents the spirit in different ways, one of which is understood by mentioning the relationship between saints and Khidr. Khidr is considered a spiritual guide in Sūfī belief, who meets with other saints on their journey and gives them advice to solve their problems, and guides them in the right way to worship God. Aṭṭār wants to make us understand that one of the advantages of the path of the saints is the meeting with the spiritual guide Khidr. However, Aṭṭār has used the water of life in a different way in the following poem, it is used for poetry love (*ghazal*).

5.2.1.4 Story of the Virtuous Woman Whose Husband Had Gone on a Journey

Aṭṭār in this poem, started by saying that (Ilāhī-Nāma, 2011, p.36):

**There was a fair and beautiful woman, night and day were the patterns
Of her cheeks and locks....**

Aṭṭār continues to praise this woman, but here he mentions the water of Khidr:

Her eyes were almond-shaped, like the letter *Sad*; her eyebrows arched.

Like the letter *Nun*; together beauty's proof, a decisive text

When she opened her shining cornelians, she would slay the mighty

With the water of Khidr... (Ilāhī-Nāma, 2011, p.36).

In this poem, Aṭṭār has taken the figure of Khidr as proof of the fascination of poetry love (*ghazal*). This is done by depending on the story's elements, which are full of imagery such as the spring of life, darkness, greenness, beauty and eternity. Aṭṭār has employed one of the story's elements for poetry love (*ghazal*), which is "the water of life". This is a hint that the story has gone far beyond the religious tradition in Aṭṭār's accounts, who uses one of the elements of the story in the context of poetry love (*ghazal*).

In conclusion, returning back to the fourth son who asked about the water of life which represents immortality, according to Aṭṭār the inner meaning of the water of life is in different aspects: first, a God-gift to Khidr; second, the meeting of Khidr where the two seas meet which is the place where Moses found Khidr as mentioned in the Quranic text; third the esoteric knowledge; and fourth, in the context poetry love (*ghazal*).

5.2.1.2 Conference of the Birds (*Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr*):

The title of this epic was inspired by the Qur'ānic verses, "And Sulaymān inherited David. He said, 'O people, we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given from all things. Indeed, this is evident bounty'" (27:16). This epic has about 4300 to 4600 verses:

The birds assemble to select a king so that they can live more harmoniously. Among them, the hoopoe, who was the ambassador sent by Sulaymān to the Queen of Sheba, considers the Simurgh, or a Persian mythical bird, to be the worthiest of this title. When the other birds make excuses to avoid making a decision, the hoopoe answers each bird satisfactorily by telling anecdotes, and when they complain about the severity and harshness of the journey

to Mount Qaf, the hoopoe tries to persuade them. Finally, the hoopoe succeeds in convincing the birds to undertake the journey to meet the Simurgh. The birds strive to traverse seven valleys: quest, love, gnosis, contentment, unity, wonder, and poverty. Finally, only thirty birds reach the abode of the Simurgh, and there each one sees his/her reflection in the celestial bird. Thus, thirty birds see the Simurgh as none other than themselves. In this way, they finally achieve self-annihilation (Lewisohn, & Shackle, 2006, p.4).

In other words, the context of the epic illustrates the Sūfī path of God; every bird in this epic represents one of the Sūfī saints, who are seeking for the Symorgh, representing God. Aṭṭār invokes the figure of Khidr in this epic in the section “*The parrots excuse and the Hoopoes report*”, which is among the litany of excuses put forward by different types of birds for not wanting or being able to join in the journey (The Conference of the Birds, 1984, p.19).

Here is the Hoopoe's teaching story:

**Khidr sought companionship with one whose mind
Was set on God alone. The man declined,
And said to Khidr: ‘We two could not be friends.
For our existences have different ends,
The waters of immortal life are yours
And you must always live; life is your cause
As death is mine -- you wish to live, whilst I;
Impatiently prepare myself to die,
I leave you as quick birds avoid a snare
To soar up in the free, untrammelled air’**

The poet has used the figure of Khidr in a negative way; as the parrot wants to seek for the water of life that represents the eternal, however, Aṭṭār objected to his request. Sviri (2001, p.6) has

evaluated this epic and asks an important question in this regard which is “why does Attār object so forcefully to the parrot's search for the water of life, Khidr, and immortality? Does Attār, the poet, voice here a subversive, eccentric, iconoclastic view of Khidr?” There appears to be an inconsistency here, as Attār has positively referred to Khidr in other places in *the Conference of the Birds* in Davis-Darbandi's translation (p. 31) quoted from (Sviri, 2001, pp.2-10):

Abandon self-love and you will see

The Way that leads us to Reality.

There knowledge is your guide, and Khidr will bring

Clear water drawn from life's eternal spring.

Attār in this poem encourages readers to seeking for the water of life, so "what does Attār mean when he rebukes the parrot for allying herself with Khidr and the search for the water of life rather than with the search for the Symorgh?" According to Sviri, (2001, p.5) a possible explanation is that “in the search for God, Attar urges the genuine seeker to renounce everything. Even the water of life and all that it stands for; the individuated consciousness must not become the goal. A search which is not for truth itself is not worth the effort. The sincere seeker will not be compromised or satisfied by any substitute, be this Khidr or the water of eternal life”.

In conclusion, this is the second of Attār's poems to invoke the figure Khidr, which shows that the continuities of the representation of Khidr in the religious genres were widely reflected on the literary material in the medieval period.

5.2.2 Jalāluddīn Muhammad Rūmī

As mentioned in the literature review, this part will focus on Rūmī's *Mathnawī* book, which gives a unique account of the figure of Khidr. Halman (2013, p.108) has mentioned that “the *Mathnawī* and hagiographies of Mevlana feature passages where Khidr assumes pivotal importance”, however, he primarily focuses on the belief of the master-disciple relationship. This is understood from the context of Rūmī's *Mathnawī* collection, which is to explain the mystical approach to have

a good relationship with God through the poetry. This approach according to Rūmī helps the disciples who are seeking the truth (*ḥaqīqa*) (Mathnawī, 2010, pp.161-68). Rustom (n.d, p.69) says that “*Mathnawī* has the couplets of inner Meaning, and countless metaphysical concepts are woven into the fabric of the text in order to elucidate important Sūfī teachings. Two concepts to which Rūmī devotes a good deal of attention are the heart and the spirit”.

As mentioned, the context of Mathnawī book is how to teach Sūfīs to reach their goal of being in true love with God. One of these lessons is the story of Moses and Khidr, which comes in four poems:

The Prophet’s Counsels to ‘Alī is distinguished here, presumably from the other followers of Prophet Muḥammad, as someone with the capacity to truly overcome his commanding soul, and the best prescription for this is to follow a master with the kind of complete submission) *taslim* (Khidr had demanded of Moses. It is worth noting that Ali is warned not to imagine he could cope on his own, and that the master is presented as someone with direct knowledge, in contrast with someone who transmits knowledge in the manner of a religious scholar (Mojaddedi, 2012, p.92).

- 1) To Follow the Direction of the Pir or Spiritual Guide, and to Endure his Chastisements Patiently
- 2) Ali, the Lion of God
- 3) The Man Whose Calling ‘O God’ Was Equivalent to God’s Answering Him ‘Here Am I’
- 4) Teachings on the Friend of God’s Relationship to law *sharī‘a*

5.2.2.1 The Prophet’s Counsels to Ali to Follow the Direction of the Pir or Spiritual Guide, and to Endure his Chastisements Patiently:

In this poem, Rūmī gives two pieces of advice to his disciples, which is to be understood according to the relationship between Khidr and Moses in their story. First, they should seek a spiritual guide in order to guide them in the right way of worshipping God. Second, disciples should follow their masters without asking any questions; disciples should learn from Moses’ mistakes during his

meeting with Khidr, when he was impatient. This narrative begins with the 34th verse following the introductory verses which include the 62-line piece (Mathnawī, 2003, p.68). The title of these verses is inspired by the following Ḥadīth, in which the Prophet said to *Imām* ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: “O ‘Alī! When you see people seek closeness to God by carrying out different good deeds, seek closeness to Him by different forms of rationality, so that you pass them” (Javadi, 2014, p.84).

As mentioned, the verse illustrates the way to have a good relationship with God. According to Rūmī, there are many ways to worship God, but the best of them is to be guided by masters (*Murshid*). Therefore, it is important for disciples to follow Sūfī masters, and they should not object to them, as Moses did with Khidr. Moses sought out Khidr and asked him to be his spiritual guide, and he was placed under the authority of Khidr. This relationship between Khidr and Moses has been taken as a model and an example to demonstrate the master-disciple relationship. Students shall not doubt things that may be considered outwardly against religious laws. This is because Sūfī masters, *sheikhs*, know secret, esoteric knowledge. Disciples should consider what happened between Moses and Khidr, as Moses made a mistake by raising objections to Khidr, who was acting according to esoteric knowledge. Because of this, Khidr said to Moses “This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently” (Q18:78). Therefore, in this poem Rūmī strongly advises disciples to take heed of Moses’ error in his meeting with Khidr as:

‘Alī is distinguished here ,presumably from the other followers of Prophet Muḥammad, as someone with the capacity to truly overcome his commanding soul, and the best prescription for this is to follow a master with the kind of complete submission Khidr had demanded of Moses. It is worth noting that Ali is warned not to imagine he could cope on his own, and that the master is presented as someone with direct knowledge, in contrast with someone who transmits knowledge in the manner of a religious scholar (*aqil v naqil*) (Mojaddedi, 2012, p.92).

5.2.2.2 Ali, the Lion of God

Ali, the Lion of God is the second of Rūmī's poems to invoke the figure Khidr in his *Mathnawī* collection. This poem focuses on one of the story's elements, the water of life. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Sūfīs believe that Khidr has become immortal in this life. This is because Khidr drank from the "water of life" which represents the source of all life. It is also believed that the water of life was discovered by Khidr. Rūmī has referred to the water of life to represent different aspects in his poems, such as the "the spiritual immortality path". He said (Mathnawī, 2003, p.86):

When the reason that lights our minds becomes inanimate.

Again, night is cancelled by the light of day,

And inanimate reason is rekindled to life by its rays.

Though darkness produces this sleep and quiet,

Is not the 'water of life' in the darkness?

Are not spirits refreshed in that very darkness?

Rūmī in these verses is alluding to the water of life which is the opposite of the land of darkness. It seems that Rūmī is describing death in this poem. This may be why Rūmī mentions the water of life, which represents eternal life. It is also Rūmī encouraging disciples to follow the Sūfī path, as it is considered as the spiritual immortality path and the other ways are considered as the land of darkness. This can be proved through the context of the synonyms that are mentioned in the poem, such as *night* and the *light of day*, and *death* and *life*.

The water of life was also referred to by Rūmī in another poem, entitled "*The Apostolical Succession of the prophets and the saints*" in his *Mathnawī* collection. Rūmī starts the poem by describing the relationship between prophets and saints. The description is associated with two aspects: first, the gifts that are bestowed on prophets and saints by God, and second, Rūmī's claim that saints are considered the successors to the prophets. Rūmī started with the Prophet Adam (Mathnawī, 2003, p.108):

With that 'brightness of lightning' He kindled their souls.

So that Adam acquired knowledge from that light,

That, which shone from Adam was gathered by Seth

Wherefore Adam made him his viceroy when he saw it

The verses are inspired by the following Qur'ānic narrative:

He taught Adam all the names [of things], then He showed them to the angels and said, 'Tell me the names of these if you truly [think you can].' They said, 'May You be glorified! We have knowledge only of what You have taught us. You are the All Knowing and All Wise.' Then He said, 'Adam, tell them the names of these.' When he told them their names, God said, 'Did I not tell you that I know what is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and that I know what you reveal and what you conceal?' (2:32-33).

In the middle of the poem, Rūmī mentions the figure of Khidr, but this time with the Prophet Elijah, as both found the water of life and became immortal. This was, according to Rūmī, gifted to them by God (Mathnawī, 2003, p.108). The same meaning was also found in Aṭṭār, as mentioned. However, the water of life has also come to mean wine or the kiss of poetry love (*ghazal*). A Persian poet, Ḥāfeẓ Shīrāzī (d.1389), skillfully played with the name Khidr, 'Greenish' when describing 'greening' down that sprouts on his friend's cheek and upper lip: "Your down is Khidr, and your mouth is the water of life" (Diwān Ḥāfeẓ, p.46 & Schimmel, 2004, p.178).

The recent scholarship of Schimmel (2004, p.178) has commented on this verse by saying that "the lover who has tasted this elixir will remain eternally alive; or rather, he has found paradise and eternal bliss already here on Earth" Ḥāfeẓ even said that "If the water of life is that which is contained in the friend's lip, then it is evident that Khidr owns only a mirage" (Diwān Ḥāfeẓ, p.46 & Schimmel, 2004, p.178).

Schimmel further explained that "compared to a lip, even Khidr's water cannot quench the lover's thirst and make him immortal" (2004, p.179).

5.2.2.3 The Man Whose Calling ‘ O God ’Was Equivalent to God's Answering Him‘ Here Am I’

This poem focuses on another element from the story, Moses’ meeting with Khidr. In fact, in the lore of Sūfī saints, many have claimed to have met Khidr on their journeys, and he gave them advice, answered their questions and inspired them. This meeting has frequently been mentioned in poetry²⁹. Rūmī referred to the meeting with Khidr in this narrative beginning with the 8th verse which includes the 38-line piece (Mathnawī, 2003, p.169). The poem is concerned with a man who is in a position of vulnerability. Suddenly, Khidr appears before him in a vision, and explains to him the reason for his situation, which is that he has stopped worshipping God. Khidr gave him a prayer to improve his relationship with God. This shows that saints meet Khidr in order to be given advice, answer their questions and inspire them. This meeting was also referred to by Rūmī in the same context in his famous poem “Here am I” (Schimmel, 1975, pp.165-66). This narrative begins with the 7th verse which includes the 17-line piece. It uses the figure of Khidr as a savior, who comes in the appropriate time to solve problems, especially matters that are related to the relationship between God and his servants. This shows the main aim of the meeting of Khidr.

5.2.2.4 Teachings on the Friend of God’s Relationship to law *sharī’a*

Teachings on the Friend of God’s Relationship to law *sharī’a* is the fourth Rūmī poem to invoke the figure of Khidr, “the narrative begins at the 36th verse following introductory verses which include the 18-line piece popularly identified as the (Song of the Reed Flute)” (Mojaddedi, 2001, pp.94-95).

The poem says that the king has bought a beautiful maiden, and then discovered that the maiden became ill, and no one was able to heal her, till a man has appeared in the king’s dream and tells him that there is a doctor who can heal the maiden. This doctor told the king the reason for her

²⁹ Interestingly, there is a special prayer recited to meet Khidr. This prayer includes the 15- line mostly is a repetition of God's different names (Coomaraswamy, 1934, pp.172-82).

illness, which is “her love for a goldsmith in Samarkand. He explained to the king that the healing of the maiden will be effected through his knowledge of “inner states”, and describes the healing of the maiden as what “rain does to a meadow”. According Halman this is "an implicitly Khidrian metaphor, reminiscent of the Ḥadīth which explains Khidr’s name as reflecting his virtue of turning barren land verdant". The doctor advised the king to lure the goldsmith, and “allows them six months of wedded bliss, and then administers to the goldsmith a potion which causes him to die" (2013, p.189).

In fact, this is the key point of these verses. According to Rūmī, we should not decry the doctor for the murder because he had the inner knowledge, which is considered the same as Khidr’s knowledge when he murdered the young boy and broke the ship, so the killing of the goldsmith is like Khidr’s killing of the boy in the second act in the story. Halman has argued that Rūmī wants to show that “when someone is killed by a doctor like this one, it’s a blessing, even though it may not seem so because we do not live, as do the doctor or Khidr, fully in truth” (2013, p.190). This is also confirmed by Mojaddedi who has commented on this poem by saying that: “Rūmī refers repeatedly to the Qur’ānic story of Khidr and Moses. The general teaching of the story with regard to acts outside of the law is that individuals very close to God, such as Khidr, who is usually classified by Sūfīs as a saint of God, act on the basis of direct communication rather than follow any legal formulations, even if this means contravening them” (2012, p.93).

To sum up it can be said that the figure of Khidr and his story was invoked in the account of Rūmī poetry through his collection *Mathnawī*. Rūmī illustrates through the story the rules of the master-disciple relationship. The water of life is considered the spiritual immortality path, and the God-gift to the saint Khidr. Rūmī has also understood from the God-gift to Khidr that saints can be the successors to the prophets. Not only this, but it can be also understood from the poems that Khidr is a savior, who comes in the appropriate time to solve problems, especially those related to the

relationship between God and his servants. This, according to Rūmī, is the main aim of the meeting of Khidr.

5.2.3 Ibn ‘Arabī

Most of the Ibn ‘Arabī poems were composed in the year that he visited Mecca (1201). In fact, Ibn ‘Arabī has two main books related to poetry, *Diwān Ibn ‘Arabī*, and *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*. Translated by Reynold Nicholson, this include the poems found in his other different books, such as *al Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* book. Most of the poems in *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* are considered poetry love (*ghazal*). “In the poems contained in this volume, using the erotic style, but he could not express even a small part of the feelings roused in him by the recollection of his love for her” (*Tarjumān al-ashwāq*, p.4). As for *Diwān Ibn ‘Arabī*, it has not been translated yet. It includes different lessons in different aspects, one of them Khidr’s knowledge and receiving the *khirqā* from Khidr. Ibn ‘Arabī was one of those who claimed that he received this *khirqā* from Khidr. Ibn ‘Arabī (Muhammad, 2012, p.121) mentioned this in the following verse:

I have willingly worn a tatter which Khidr had

This has taken place in Makkah, next to Alka’bah.

The *khirqā* in these verses is a symbol of a higher level of piety, which has confirmed in the following poem:

My soul's charming qualities (good features) have attracted my heart.

I wore the apparel of devoutness as the best one which I feel proud above Khidr's tatter.

That apparel is all the morals together with the ethics of the Qur’ān’s verses and chapters.

The context of the meeting between Ibn ‘Arabī and Khidr shows that Khidr selects the saints, and gives them the *khirqā* which is a high stage of the dignity. This means Khidr’s role is that of a teacher, as has been shown in in the Qur’ān. There is also an important point in this regard. Ibn ‘Arabī has clearly confirmed that he has met and seen Khidr, in addition to his beliefs that Khidr

is still alive which seem to have been so widely discussed. The story of Khidr is also used to prove that saints are different from other people, as saints are the most knowledgeable, of the highest state, and the most aware of the news of all other people. It can be also understood that the one who meets Khidr has reached a higher level of piety (God-fear). However, the recent scholarship of Halman has drawn our attention to an important point in this regard which is the language that is used in the meeting between Ibn ‘Arabī and Khidr. He argued that it is the “language of spiritual states” (2013, p.191), and adds that Ibn ‘Arabi “was addressed by Khidr in Khidr’s own language. This serves to express both the idea of Khidr’s knowledge as intelligent discourse and the inexpressibility of its distinctive dimension. As a language it is intelligible; as Khidr’s special language, it is reserved as the privilege of the spiritual elite (*khāṣṣ*)” (2013, p.191). In fact, the text of both the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth refer to the knowledge of Khidr; the Qur’ān says, “and they found a servant from among our servants to whom we had given mercy from us and had taught him from us a [certain] knowledge” (Q18:64-65). In the Ḥadīth, the prophet says: “I (Khidr) have knowledge which God has taught me, and which you (Moses) do not know, and you have knowledge which God has taught you and which I do not know” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123). In fact, Ibn ‘Arabī is among those few who deemed themselves to be able to understand the knowledge of Khidr which Moses himself could not understand.

To sum up, the most important point that is added by Ibn ‘Arabī regarding the meeting with Khidr is that saints can receive the *khirqā* from Khidr, which is considered a symbol of a higher level of piety.

In conclusion, this section has discussed the impact of the figure of Khidr in Sūfī poetry, concentrating on those medieval Sūfī poets who are considered the most influential Sūfī scholars of their time: Aṭṭār, Rūmī and Ibn ‘Arabī. This confirms the presence of the figure of Khidr in the poets’ minds, through aspects of influence and intertextuality in Sūfī poetry. Poets either see Khidr as a teacher, or they produce educational poems that explain the Qur’ānic story’s dimensions, or

confirm the behavior of a disciple to their *sheikh*, such as not being insistent or challenging. Poets also take Khidr as a proof of the fascination of poetry love (*ghazal*), relying on the story's elements: the spring of life, darkness, greenness, beauty and eternity. Some other poets employ Khidr to express their spiritual states and their *māqamāt*, as we have seen for Ibn ʿArabī.

The poets in favour of Khidr's immortality outnumber those that oppose it. This is because his survival is more attractive than the alternative since the marvel is seen to be Khidr's travels and his sudden appearances, before hiding again.

The poets' interest in Khidr and their employing him in their poems reflect the critical situation of man regarding life and death, passing away and eternity. The tale of Khidr's survival and his drinking of the water of life/eternity, are but the desire of man to find that spring, which is an unrealisable dream that nevertheless we do not stop searching for. It is the longing for the impossibility of eternity. This indicates that there is a link between literature myths and symbols on the one hand and the human mind on the other.

5.3 Khidr's Symbolism in Sūfī Prose

The figure of Khidr is also found in prose, in different aspects:

- 1) Khidr in folk literature: In this part, the study will present two folk stories. The first is the story of Prince Mahbūb. The second is the story of *Buluqiya*.
- 2) Khidr in short stories. This part will present three stories by three medieval Sūfī saints: ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Aṭṭār and Ibn ʿArabī.
- 3) Travellers and Khidr: This part will present some of the mausoleums and shrines dedicated to Khidr, which are found throughout the Islamic world.

5.3.1 Khidr in Folk Literature:

As mentioned, this part has two stories: The first story is the story of Prince Mahbūb, which is an Indian folk tale³⁰. Coomaraswamy has argued that “the prophet, saint, or deity known as *Khawājā* Khizr (Khadir), Pīr Badar, or Rājā Kidār, is the object of a still surviving popular cult, common to Muslims and Hindus. His principal shrine is on the Indus near Bakhar. Iconographically *Khawājā* Khizr is represented as an aged man, having the aspect of a fakir, clothed entirely in green, and moving in the waters with a "fish" as his vehicle” (1934, pp.172-82).

This story of Prince Mahbūb says that one of the kings of Iran had only one son, from one of his concubines. This son, named Kassāb, became the heir apparent. After this, the queen becomes pregnant, and gives birth to a boy. The first son fears that he will be displaced by the new prince; because of this, he kills his father the king and usurps the throne. At this time, the queen escapes and leaves her son, who is called Mahbūb, with a farmer who looks after him. “Later he goes alone to court, and becomes the victor in athletic contests, particularly as an archer. The people recognize his likeness to the late king”. When he returns home, his mother tells him his real lineage and his birth, and “both set out on their travels in order to avoid the usurper's suspicion”. During their travels, they arrive in a desert land where they found a mosque, and beside it they meet a *faqīr*. This *faqīr* was Khidr, who gives them bread and water that are inexhaustible, and two pieces of wood to use to cross the sea. They reach India, where “they sell one of the rubies at a great price. It comes into the hands of the king of that country”. The king discovers the source of the ruby, which is from the palace in a wonderful garden. In the palace, there is a room where there is a freshly severed head, from which drops of blood are falling, and turn to rubies. Suddenly, Khidr appears again, but now he is clad in garments of light. Khidr explains to Mahbūb that: “the corpse is his father's, who had been murdered by the usurper Kassāb; immediately the head is joined to

³⁰ This story mentioned in *Folk tales of Hindustan*, by Chilli, S. However, I can not find any information about the author.

the body, and the dead king rises up alive. Khidr vanishes, and Mahbūb returns to India with his father, who is thus reunited with the widowed queen” (Chilli, 1913, p.151).

Ananda Coomaraswamy, in his article *Khwājā Khidr and the Fountain of Life in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art* has commented on this story by saying that:

The true nature of *Khwājā Khidr* is already clearly indicated in the story summarized above, as well as in the iconography. Khidr is at home in both worlds, the dark and the light, but above all master of the flowing River of Life in the Land of Darkness: he is at once the guardian and genius of vegetation and of the Water of Life, and corresponds to Soma and Gandharva in Vedic mythology, and in many respects to Varuria himself, though it is evident that he cannot, either from the Islamic or from the later Hindu point of view, be openly identified with the supreme deity. We shall find these general conclusions amply confirmed by further examinations of the sources of the Islamic legends of Khidr (1934, pp.172-82).

It seems that this folktale is to be found in both Iran and India, with Mahbūb representing the good and Kassāb representing the evil. This opposition gives Khidr two roles: the first one is to rescue from hunger, thirst and drowning. The second is to cause the head to be joined to the body, and the dead king to rise up alive. It is also noted that there is a relationship between this story and the tales of Khidr in Sūfī heritage; as there is substantial overlap between them in terms of Khidr’s attributes, including giving life to the dead and the relationship between Khidr and the sea, also, there is the usual situation of Khidr vanishing at the end.

The second story is the story of Buluqiya. As mentioned, the figure Khidr appears in *Arabian Nights: Tales from a Thousand and One Nights (Alf Laylah Wa Laylah)*. It is considered one of the most important folk literature books, it is:

A pre-eminent travelling text; a prime example of world literature in deep time (to adapt Wai Chee Dimock’s reflections in *Through Other Continents*), it holds out for scrutiny an

extraordinarily fertile case of cross-fertilisation, re-tellings, grafts and borrowings, over-writing, imitation, and dissemination back and forth between Persia, India, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, and Europe, and then back again into its homelands, over a very longue duree. The very concept of the sequence of narratives – the interlaced tales with the frame of a ransom tale - as well as its individual story elements, became global nomads, travelled back and forth, camping and settling until they became indigenous throughout the world of literature (Makdisi, &Nussbaum, 2008, p.328).

Khidr is only mentioned with regards to Night 532 (Irwin, 2010), which gives a unique account of the wondrous ability of Khidr and his unique qualities in this story.

Shahrazad in the five hundred and thirty-second night tells that during this night, Khidr came to take Buluqiya to his hometown in Egypt; there was a conversation between them, in which Khidr asked Buluqiya, tell me about yourself and your story. After Buluqiya told Khidr his story, he asked Khidr about the distance from here to Egypt. Khidr replied:

It would take ninety-five years. On hearing this, Buluqiya burst into tears and, falling before Khidr, he kissed his hands and said: ‘Rescue me from this exile, may God reward you, for I am on the point of death and there is nothing that I can do. Khidr replied: ‘Pray that Almighty God may allow me to take you back to Egypt before you die’. .Buluqiya presented his request in tears to God, and God accepted it, conveying to Khidr His divine message that Buluqiya should be brought back to his family. ‘Raise your head ,’Khidr told him, ‘for God has accepted your petition and told me to take you to Egypt. Take hold of me, gripping with your hands and shutting your eyes’. Khidr then took a single pace, after which he told Buluqiya to open his eyes, and when he did so he found himself at the door of his own house. He turned to take his leave of al-Khidr, but could find no trace of him (Irwin, 2010, Night 532).

It is clear here that Buluqiya is influenced by Khidr's speech and his meeting with him. Khidr also adds an atmosphere of legend to events, by removing himself and Buluqiya from reality.

Khidr appears in this story also as savior, especially in very hard times. Therefore, the folk books use the figure Khidr who has an ability to accomplish miracles, which other humans cannot do. This makes the stories more beautiful and interesting for the listeners and the readers. It can be said that there is no difference between the roles of Khidr in this story and his roles in Sūfī stories as the figure of Khidr most often appears in Sūfī stories as a savior; he is asked about his identity and reveals that he is Khidr; then he disappears as it will be seen in the next section.

5.3.2 Khidr in (Short Stories)

The figure of Khidr has been invoked in short stories, according to his image as presented in his story. According to the Qur'ān, Khidr was bestowed with wisdom and knowledge, and the Prophet Moses was sent by God to Khidr in order to learn from him. However, medieval Sūfīs believe that Khidr has also been sent by God to meet the saints and guide them to the right way; leading to many tales and transmitted reports about Khidr. This is because, according to Sūfīs, Khidr seeks out saints on their journeys to give them advice, answer their questions and inspire them. Therefore, the context of most Sūfī short stories presented below are a hagiographic account of the sayings and miraculous deeds (*karāmāts*) of eminent Sūfīs and other religious figures from the early Islamic centuries" (Este'lami, 2004). One of these miraculous deeds (*karāmāts*) is the meeting with Khidr. The figure of Khidr most often appears in Sūfī tales as a savior; he is asked about his identity and reveals that he is Khidr; then he disappears. In addition, Khidr is usually associated with the elements of his story, such as knowledge and the water of life. Khidr also usually has the main role in these tales. Here are some examples of these tales.

According to Munawar (2015, pp.133-38) Ibn 'Arabī narrates that:

One night, travelling by boat, he saw a man walking on the water towards him. Upon reaching the boat, Khidr stood on the sea and showed him that his feet were still dry. After that, Khidr conversed with Ibn ‘Arabī in a language which is peculiar to him.

Ibn ‘Arabī clearly confirms that he has seen and met Khidr, and he also talks about Khidr’s miracle of walking on water without his feet getting wet. Khidr also knows what is in one’s mind, respects the saints and he advocates for them against those who deny the existence of miracles. Thus, Khidr’s role is that of a teacher, as has been shown in the Qur’ān, in the story of Moses and Khidr. Ibn ‘Arabī does not forget to describe the location and specify it geographically, as a means of confirming the truth of the tale to the reader.

Another short story by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (Miracles, 2003, p.58) states:

A thief entered the house of *sheik* ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, but then the thief became blind and could do nothing. At the same time, Khidr visited the *sheikh* and told him: ‘O friend of God! *Walī* has passed away. You should appoint another person in his place’, the shaykh answered: ‘Someone who entered my house is in severe difficulties. Take him and give him the rank of one of the *abdaal*!’ Khidr took him to *sheikh* ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and when the *sheikh* cast a look towards the thief, he could once again see and became one of the *abdaal*.

The aim of this story is to show the miracle of the saint ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. However, it can be noted that the story presents the character of Khidr as he visits ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and tells him about the death of one of the ‘*Abdal*’. This shows Khidr’s responsibility for them.

Aṭṭār has also mentioned the story of the famous mystic Ebrahim ibn Adham, who journeyed to Mecca and met Khidr:

In the desert he encountered one of the great men of the Faith, who taught him the Greatest Name of God and then took his departure. Ebrahim called upon God by that Name, and immediately he beheld Khidr, upon whom be peace. ‘Ebrahim’, said Khidr, ‘that was my

brother David who taught you the Greatest Name', Then many words passed between Khidr and Ebrahim. Khidr was the first who drew Ebrahim out, by the leave of God. Ebrahim relates as follows concerning the next stage of his pilgrimage (Aṭṭār, 2007, p.70). The story presents the character of Khidr as a teacher, who taught the mystic Ebrahim the Greatest Name of God³¹.

Another story took place with the mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī who was:

Sitting in the cemetery, weeping bitterly, and said 'Here am I left here, neglected and ignorant. My friends will come back, perfectly trained scholars'. Suddenly there appeared a luminous elder who addressed him. 'My son ,why do you weep?' al-Tirmidhī told him his tale. 'Would you like me to teach you a lesson daily, so that you will soon outstrip them?' he asked. 'I would,' al-Tirmidhī replied. 'So,' al-Tirmidhī recalled, 'every day he taught me a lesson, till three years had gone by. Then I realized that he was Khidr, and that I had attained this felicity because I pleased my mother.' Every Sunday (so Abū Bakr Warrāq reports (Khidr would visit al-Tirmidhī and they would converse on every matter. One day he said to me, 'Today I will take you somewhere.' 'The master knows best,' I replied (Aṭṭār, 2007, p.228).

This story also presents the character of Khidr as a teacher, which is understood from the Qur'ānic story, as Khidr teaches Moses knowledge that Moses did not possess. It is also noticeable that the creative imagination in these stories does not exceed the original Qur'ān and Ḥadīth texts regarding the nature of Khidr, who appears and disappears without reason.

However, Sviri has argued that such stories come often through dreams, "Khidr-dreams come from the deepest, most ancient recesses of the soul. Khidr in dreams is a sign of a shift, a tremendous

³¹ "God in Islamic belief has 99 names, and in some Islamic traditions it is believed that there is a special hidden 100th name, which is the greatest" (El Fadl, 2000, pp.6-10).

inner movement in the psyche” (Sviri, 2001, p.90) such a dream is "often initiated through the grace of a living teacher in whom the mystical tradition is perpetuated" (Sviri, 2001, p.93). The relationship between such stories and the figure of Khidr according to Sviri “alludes also to the esoteric nature of the mystical teaching. What is related in books or transmitted orally is not the complete teaching. There are things which belong to the realm of the unspoken. That Khidr is also he who guards the true esoteric aspects of the tradition can be gleaned from the above mysterious story” (1997, p.100).

5.3.3 Travellers and Khidr

Khidr has many mausoleums spread around the world. This is due to the many tales about him; travellers visit these mausoleums and write down what they see and hear of the tales concerning Khidr (Muhammad, 2012, p.137). Fiction becomes interlaced with facts to explain and resolve ambiguous phenomena relating to Khidr. Travellers did not limit themselves to merely recording the stories, but added to them from their own imagination. For example, Muhammad Ibn Baṭūṭah (d 1369), a medieval traveller, was widely known as the greatest traveller in Islamic tradition. Ibn Baṭūṭah provided many tales relating to Khidr and his journeys (Muhammad, 2012, p.137). For example, when talking about the Strait of Hormuz, Ibn Baṭūṭah mentions that, some miles away from the town, there is a shrine ascribed to Khidr and Elijah. It is mentioned that both Khidr and Elijah prayed in it.

Travellers have also paid attention to the town that was visited by Moses and Khidr in their story. The Qur’ān says “So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. And they found therein a wall about to collapse, so Khidr restored it” (Q18:62).

Yāqūt ibn-'Abdullah al-Rūmī al-Hamawī (d.1229) (Muhammad, 2012, p.109): mentions that Tlemsann (Tlemcen or Třemsan) is the town where Khidr rebuilt the wall, as mentioned in the Qur’ānic story. It has also been said that Khidr’s sanctuary is situated in Damascus, where Khidr

lived. Abū Yahya Zakariya' ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini (d. 1283) (Muhammad, 2012, p.109) also confirmed that Tlemsann is the town that was mentioned in the story of Moses and Khidr in the third act where they build the wall.

It is also mentioned that Khidr's mausoleum:

is located in the middle of the historical city of Karak. It is known as the 'Rock' or the 'Desert Rock'. It is an ancient mausoleum, which believers visit for prayer and the invocation of God. In the 16th century, a small church was established in an area of forty square meters; it was here on the 'Rock' that Moses met the pious man Khidr (Mustafa, 2003, p.77).

There are also some Islamic countries, such as Turkey, Bahrain and others, that have mosques that bear the name of Khidr and such countries have tales of Khidr, although these may vary in content. In fact, legends do not baselessly evolve, but rather they are a result of a folklore culture dating back centuries. Therefore, these mosques, which are found in many countries, prove the presence of Khidr in the culture of the regions, and that people still believe Khidr to be alive.

5.4 Conclusion

This is the last chapter of this thesis, Khidr's symbolism In Medieval Sūfī Literature, it has two sections. The first section concerns Khidr in Sūfī poetry, the second is about Khidr in prose. The aim of this chapter was how Khidr can be placed within this tradition: this can be as follows:

Poets either see Khidr as a teacher, savior and a guide of people to the right way to worship God. Poets also take Khidr as a proof of the (poetry love) (*ghazl*), relying on the story's elements: the spring of life, darkness, greenness, beauty and eternity. Some other poets also employ Khidr to express their spiritual states and their *māqamāt*, as we have seen for Ibn 'Arabī. This reflects the critical situation of man regarding life and death, passing away and eternity. The tale of Khidr's survival and his drinking of the water of life/eternity, are but the desire of man to find that spring, which is an unrealizable dream that, nevertheless, we do not stop searching for. It is the longing

for the impossibility of eternity. This shows that there is a link between literary myths and symbols on the one hand and the human mind on the other. The figure of Khidr is also found in prose in different aspects. For example, Khidr in folk literature was used as a savior and hero especially in times of difficulty and peril. In the short story, Khidr is usually connected with the elements of his story, such as knowledge and the water of life. Khidr is also usually the major character in these tales. Travellers have also paid attention to the journeys of Khidr, especially the town that is visited by Moses and Khidr in their story. It can be said that names have changed, and multiple legends evolved from the intermingling of the religious and sacred with the folkloric and legendary; this mingling has resulted in the figure of Khidr becoming a permanent figure in religion, literature, criticism, and folklore.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

The present study was designed to determine the effect of the figure of Khidr on medieval Sūfī who have claimed that Khidr provided them with a microcosm of the heart of the Sūfī path. It has sought to answer the following questions: 1) Who is the servant of God (Khidr)?; How have medieval Sūfīs analysed his story with the Prophet Moses?; 3) Why have they been criticized for their understanding of Khidr's story? This study was an attempt to shine a new light on these debates.

The research considered the hypothesis that Khidr can be understood through the texts of both the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, which are considered the two main resources for understanding Qur'ānic stories, including the story of Khidr. However, a third resource was employed by Sūfīs to understand the figure of Khidr, which are narratives and tales about Khidr.

Before examining the research questions, the first chapter provided an overview of the most important relevant literature, which was discussed under two categories of religious texts; the Qur'ānic text and the Ḥadīth text. Together these two sources are considered, according to Islamic belief, the two main resources in understanding Qur'ānic stories including the story of Moses and Khidr as they provided valuable details about Khidr. The next stage involved medieval Sūfī sources which also present valuable details in regard to the understanding of Khidr, as they believe that Khidr is still alive, that they have meetings with him, and that he gives them advice, answers their questions, and protects them. There are also some Sunni sources that presented useful information about Khidr mainly in replying to Sūfī belief in the understanding of the story of Moses and Khidr. As a result, there is a considerable debate about the understanding of the story of Moses and Khidr, which was explored and examined in this current study.

There are also several modern sources, which discuss issues related to the story of Moses and Khidr. One noticeable feature of the modern sources is that most of the Western scholars focus their attention on the link between the story of Khidr and the story of Elijah on one hand and the legend of Gilgamesh epic on another hand. The possible explanation behind this is that they attempt to identify external sources for Qur'ānic interpretation, especially concerning Qur'ānic stories.

There are also a few books that are written in the Arabic language concerning the story, however, most attention is paid in such books to discussing the nature of Khidr, whether he is still alive or has he passed away, a prophet or a saint. However, little interest is taken in other topics related to the understanding of the story by medieval Sūfī belief. Therefore, this concentration does not include information on key themes of the understanding of the figure of Khidr by medieval Sūfīs. More clearly, the main aim of this research, Khidr in medieval Sūfī was not the focus of any previous studies.

Chapter 2 was concerned with Sūfī sources for understanding the figure of Khidr. Those sources included the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and narratives and tales about Khidr. The first section of the chapter concerns Khidr in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. The second section concerns narratives and tales about Khidr. To fully understand the figure of Khidr, there was a third section in this chapter on the nature of the figure of Khidr. The primary aim of Chapter 2 was to give an overview of how the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth present the story of Khidr, to see what makes Khidr important, and how the Prophet Muḥammad evaluated both Khidr and Moses in the story. The second aim of this chapter was to answer the following questions: was Khidr a prophet or a saint, and is Khidr still alive or has he passed away?

The discussion of the Qur'ān section focused on two matters:

- 1) The background to the story of Moses and Khidr.

2) The Qur'ānic narrative of Moses and Khidr (Q18:60-82).

The story is in the eighteenth chapter of the Qur'ān, which locates it in the middle of the Qur'ān, and the story itself is located in the middle of this chapter. It is 22 verses. It can be understood from the text of the Qur'ān that the story concerns the Prophet Moses and the Servant of God (Khidr). The Qur'ān has no definition of the 'Servant of God'. Nevertheless, the Qur'ān has described him as a wise, knowledgeable and merciful person, which opens a way for reflection on the nature of Khidr, especially his knowledge. It can also be understood that there are three main events that occur during the meeting between Moses and Khidr:

- 1) The issue of the ship
- 2) The boy who was killed by Khidr
- 3) The issue of the wall

Each of these events was found objectionable to Moses and questions he Khidr about them. According to the discussion this is because Moses cannot understand Khidr's knowledge and the reasons behind his actions, which Khidr later explains to Moses. According to the text of the Qur'ān, Khidr was not acting of his own accord, which means he was following God's instructions.

This is the extent of the narrative provided by the Qur'ān. However, the text of the Ḥadīth provides many more details about the story. Six issues are discussed under the Ḥadīth section:

- 1) The reasons behind Moses' journey.
- 2) The events that happened in the story.
- 3) An analysis of the dialogue between Moses and Khidr in the story.
- 4) The evaluation of both Moses and Khidr by the Prophet Muḥammad.
- 5) The interpretation of the events that happened in the story.
- 6) The person of the 'Servant of God' (Khidr) and the time period of the story.

This section deduces that the figure of Nawf al-Bikali, who is mentioned in al-Bukhārī's narratives, is considered the original source of the Ḥadīth stories about Khidr. In addition, the study showed that the journey of Moses to seek Khidr took place after Moses received the Torah; Khidr says to Moses "Is it not sufficient for you that the Torah is in your hands". This means that the reaction of Moses and his decisions in the story are informed by the Torah. However, this also opens the door of reflection on the relationship between prophecy and other types of knowledge, which is discussed in the study. In addition, there are reasons and justifications behind Moses' journey to learn from Khidr, which were mentioned in the Ḥadīth. It is a type of training (*ta'dīb*). For that reason, Moses was sent by God in order to learn from Khidr.

The Ḥadīth section has also confirmed that there are three main vague events that happen during the journey of Moses and Khidr, which resulted in the three main conversations between them. These took place when the ship was broken, when the boy was killed, and when the wall was rebuilt. These events show that Prophet Moses broke the promise that he gave to Khidr to be patient on three occasions. However, according to the text of the Ḥadīth, there may have been general justifications and other special reasons for that. With regards to general justifications, Moses was criticised at the beginning by Khidr, who said that Moses will not be able to have patience with Khidr. This might be due to Khidr already knowing that he would do things that ostensibly go against Moses' message, such as when he killed a sinless boy. Moses could not understand that there were reasons, justifications and a purpose behind Khidr's actions, which were then explained later by Khidr. Therefore, Khidr knows that the Prophet Moses will not be able to have patience. This perhaps explains the position of Khidr, who says, according to the Qur'ān, "How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?" (Q 18:68). This illustrates that Moses could not understand Khidr's knowledge, because Khidr has knowledge from God that Moses did not share, and conversely, Moses has knowledge of God that Khidr did not know.

In addition, both the Qur'ān and Ḥadīths refer to an important point that could be taken as justification for Moses' lack of patience. The promise that was given by Moses was restricted by "God's will", which means "God willing, you will find me patient" (18:69). This means that patience depends on God, not on the Prophet Moses. Another possible explanation of Moses' behavior is that Moses had not been promised to see things that went against his message because the knowledge that Moses was asked to learn was limited to sound judgement. The Qur'ān says: "May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?" (18:71).

In addition, the text of both the Qur'ān and Ḥadīths demonstrate specific reasons for Moses' lack of patience; the first excuse is forgetting. However, the Prophet Moses did not forget his promise again in the second situation; he intentionally demanded an immediate explanation for actions that seemed to him unjust and inexplicable at that moment. A possible explanation for this may be that Moses found himself in a very strange situation that was contrary to divine laws, and was not logical or justified in his perception.

Therefore, the first excuse for Moses' lack of patience is forgetfulness, and in the second instance, Moses intentionally demanded an immediate explanation for Khidr's action. This also happened on the third occasion, but for a different reason, which led Khidr to say that "This is where you and I part company" (Q 18:78). This took place when Khidr rebuilt the wall that was collapsing. Moses could not understand why he did not ask for payment. At this point, the Prophet Muḥammad evaluated Moses situation by saying that "We wished that Moses could have been more patient so that God might have described to us more about their story" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book 3, Ḥadīth 123). It was not usual for Prophet Muḥammad to comment on a Qur'ānic story, but he evaluated this story, which may indicate that "the final judgment by Muḥammad implicitly lauds Khidr's knowledge, at the same time as it underscores Moses's lack of patience. On both accounts, the prophetic dictum opens a way for reflection on the meaning of Khidr's role. In a related

interpretation, the prophet also distinguished Moses' role in bringing the journey to a close" (Halman, 2013, p.76).

Regarding the knowledge of Khidr, the Ḥadīth text has not provided more detail than the Qur'ān. It is only found that Khidr had knowledge from God that Moses did not share, and conversely, Moses had knowledge from God that Khidr did not know. Nevertheless, the Ḥadīth provides the name of the Servant of God; as Khidr 'the green man', which represents a color, and refers to a place having green plants. This is because, whenever Khidr walked through any barren land in which nothing was growing, when he settled down there, everything became green. However, Sūfīs argued that this color represents "freshness of spirit and eternal liveliness" (Omar, 1993, p.4); this is because Sūfīs believe that Khidr came to be known as eternal and immortal in this life. This leads to one of the most debated subjects regarding Khidr, which is whether he is still alive or has he passed away.

However, the thesis deduces that there are many tales and narratives about Khidr that have constituted since the Sūfīs have claimed that they have had encounters with Khidr in their journeys. The discussion showed that there are two purposes behind meeting Khidr. Firstly, such a meeting is a high honor for a saint and raises him far above his peers. Second, according to Sūfīs, Khidr has given saints advice, answered their questions and inspired them, leading to many tales and transmitted reports about Khidr. The recent scholarship of Patrick Franke has mentioned in his study *Begegnung met Khidr* (2000), which consists of about 150 Sūfī stories regarding their meetings with Khidr. Franke, in his discussion, came to the conclusion that the Sufi accounts are imaginary. Despite this evaluation, it is clear these narratives have strongly affected medieval Sūfī belief in the understanding of the figure of Khidr. For example, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 900), who is probably the first to claim that he met Khidr, had a disciple, Abū Bakr Warrāq (d. 893), that relates that Khidr used to visit him every Sunday, and they used to converse with each other (al-Hujwīrī, 1976, p.166).

Therefore, this thesis concludes that these narratives about Khidr are useful as a source for understanding the role and function of the figure of Khidr in medieval Sūfism. They extend our knowledge about Khidr. For example, Khidr is still alive and meets with saints to answer their questions, solve their problems, and protect them. Not only this, but Khidr has also performed miracles, such as walking on water without his feet getting wet. Khidr also knows what is on one's mind and discusses it, respects the saints, and advocates for them against those who deny miracles.

The meeting of the saints with Khidr also proves that a saint is different from other people because a saint is the most knowledgeable, of the highest state, and the most aware of the news of all people. This is realized by taking the story of Khidr and Moses as a proof that saints can see what others cannot. It is also noteworthy that the one who has met or received knowledge from Khidr has reached the stage of *Khideri*. *Khideri* is a stage of spirituality; this is a stage for worshipers who enjoy an elevated degree of faith and are known as righteous servants (*ṣāliḥūn*) because they have learned from Khidr. Additionally, there are many practices that have been encouraged by Khidr, such as the Sūfī way of praying and *dhikr*. Therefore, the thesis concluded that the majority of scholars believe that he was not a prophet, and he is still alive. This was also supported by the idea that Khidr drank from the water of life, which represents the source of life.

However, the discussion showed that the exaggeration of the use of *the water of life* by Sūfīs has led some Western scholars to link the story of Moses and Khidr to the legend of Gilgamesh epic and the story of the Prophet Elijah. This has been challenged by the recent work of Brannon Wheeler in his book *Moses in the Qur'ān and Islamic Exegesis*. Wheeler argued that the element of the water of life is not mentioned explicitly in the text of the Qur'ān, but it is mentioned only in the commentaries of the Qur'ān. In other words, according to Wheeler, there are in fact stories in circulation that were adopted by the *mafassirūn* and taken as an explanation for vague Qur'anic passages. He considers this as the main point that is used to link the story of Khidr with the legend of Gilgamesh epic, and the Prophet Elijah. In fact, the discussion in this regard shows that Wheeler

has made a strong argument that the commentators of the Qur'ān should reconsider some of the alleged sources used to understand the story of Moses and Khidr. Furthermore, Western scholars should also make a distinction between the Qur'ānic text and its interpretation by the commentators of the Qur'ān.

The next chapter entitled “Khidr’s symbolism In Medieval Sūfī Beliefs”, was divided into 2 sections:

- 1) Khidr: The Question of the Superiority of Saints Over Prophets.
- 2) Khidr: A Symbol of Esoteric Knowledge.

This chapter aimed to answer the following questions:

- How could Khidr teach the Prophet Moses knowledge that the latter did not know? Does this refer to Khidr having a higher rank than Moses?
- What is the knowledge that is bestowed on Khidr and can it be inspired to others? In other words, is the verse Q 18:65 applicable only to Khidr, or can it be applied to other saints as well?

The discussion on the first section has gone through different stages, it started with the mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d.900), who is considered the first to establish or introduce the theory of the seal of the saints (*walāya*) as a doctrine to the Sūfīs in his book *Khatm al-awliyā’*, *the seal of the saints* (1999). The section then moved to identify how Sūfī after al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī deal with this belief and how it relates to the story of Khidr. The next stage discussed how modern scholars have evaluated the discussion about this belief.

The study showed that there is a relationship between the question of the superiority of saints over prophets and the story of Moses and Khidr. This was understood by some scholars such as the mystic al-Sarrāj and Ibn Taymīyah as there are some Sūfī scholars who have argued that Khidr

who is a *walī* has knowledge that Moses who is a prophet did not have in the Qur'ānic story, which maybe explain the potential of superiority of saints over prophets at least regarding their knowledge. This is found in al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in his book *Khatm al-awliyā'*, *the seal of the saints* (1999, pp.347-48).

The discussion shows that the question of the superiority of saints over prophets was discussed by many Sūfī scholars after al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, but they have not strongly been engaged with this belief, as they have briefly mentioned it in their books while even ignoring al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and his book. According to the discussion, this is probably due to the test or questionnaire that is mentioned by al-Tirmidhī in his book *Khatm al-awliyā'*. The test is for the person who considers himself worthy to achieve to the secret of sainthood *walāya* and it is about 157 questions. In other words, according to al-Tirmidhī the person who can answer these questions should be considered the seal of the saints. The first who ventured to pass this test is Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī, who has answered this questionnaire in different books. The study concluded that these questions are probably the main reason for scholars who have not strongly engaged on this belief till the time of Ibn 'Arabī, (d.1240) who was highly influenced by that of al-Tirmidhī.

The study shows that most of Ibn 'Arabī's discussion about the belief took place when he attempts to answer the questions mentioned by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī. The most attention is paid to the story of Moses and Khidr in questions number 19 and 83:

In the question number 83, *what is the prophecy?* Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes between prophecy and saints by saying that 'God gave prophets the title of the prophecy which is only limited to them, but God has also given to saints that which he has not given to the prophets. According to Ibn 'Arabī, the meaning of the last passage is similar to Khidr who is a saint (*walī*) and God has granted him knowledge more than Moses who is a prophet. Ibn 'Arabī argued by saying that still there are scholars who have claimed that Moses is more knowledgeable than Khidr! Ibn 'Arabī supports

this argument by saying that Khidr says to Moses according to the Ḥadīth text that “I (Khidr) have knowledge which God has taught me, and which you (Moses) do not know...” this should mean that God gave saints knowledge which is not given to anyone before including prophets, so God made them as *faḍā’il wā-maḥaḍūā’il*.

More details were provided by Ibn ‘Arabī in this regard when he was replying to the 19th question of “how is the station of the prophets situated in relation to that of the saints?” (Chodkiewicz, 1993, p.34).

Ibn ‘Arabī divided prophecy into two parts, the first part is legislative prophethood (*nubuwwāt at-tashrī’ī*), which ends with the end of its message. The second part is general prophecy (*nubuwwah ‘āmma*), which never ends; it exists to eternity, and is called the prophecy of the saints (*nubuwwāt al-walāya*) by Ibn ‘Arabī. The first part, legislative prophethood that ceases, is similar to what happened to the prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad because according to Ibn ‘Arabī, it is only related to the legislative side. This could also mean that it is not comprehensive. According to Ibn ‘Arabī, this should explain the position of the Prophet Moses who could not understand Khidr in the story, as Moses has only *nubuwwāt at-tashrī’ī*. The second part, general prophecy that never ends, also means that *walāya* is total and universal. Ibn ‘Arabī maintains that this explains the position of Khidr who has *nubuwwāt al-walāya*.

This belief was fully developed in the thirteenth century by Ibn ‘Arabī. However, the thesis concluded that this analysis still does not establish the possibility of superiority of a saint over a prophet, as both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn ‘Arabī have not explicitly claimed that saints can be of a higher rank than prophets although they argued that Khidr is more knowledgeable than Moses in the story. However, this is unlike what Ibn Taymīyah who is, according to the study, the first to issue a strict criticism against such a belief and he understood that this could mean that saints can be of a higher rank than prophets. He also mentioned both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī as he

established this belief and Ibn ‘Arabī who subsequently developed it. Ibn Taymīyah understood that the comparison itself between the seal of the prophets and seal of the saints means that the latter is superior, and he refers to the story of Khidr as the beginning of this belief. While he argued that Moses is better than Khidr, he also admitted that Khidr is more knowledgeable than Moses in the Qur’ānic story. However, he maintained that this does not mean that Khidr was superior to Moses by providing evidence from the Qur’ān to support his arguments. Despite Ibn Taymīyah’s position, this study concluded that ‘compared to’ does not mean ‘superior to’. Therefore, this analysis still does not establish the possibility of superiority of a saint over a prophet.

Ibn Taymīyah refers to new evidence that, in his opinion, proves that Khidr’s knowledge does not necessitate that he had a higher rank than Moses. The new evidence is the story of the pollination of palm trees. However, the study shows that there may not be a relationship between the story of the pollination of the palm and Muḥammad, and the story of Moses and Khidr. This is due to the former not being related to matters of religious law, whereas the latter, story of Moses and Khidr, deals with matters of religious law.

This has been corroborated by some contemporary scholarly works such as those of Sarrio and Chodkiewicz who have engaged in some parts of this discussion and argued that Ibn ‘Arabī does not refer to the belief of superiority of saints over prophets at all, and they have argued that scholars need to better understand al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn ‘Arabī’s explanation in this regard.

The following section of this chapter discussed Khidr’s knowledge and its relationship to saints. The section aimed to answer the following questions

- 1) What is the knowledge that is bestowed to Khidr?
- 2) Can it be inspired to others? In other words, is the verse Q 18:65 applicable only to Khidr, or can it be applied to other saints as well?

To answer these questions, several important medieval Sūfī scholars were scanned such as al-Tustarī, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī al-Qushayrī. Included in the discussion is a treatise concerning this kind of knowledge written by Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d.1111), which is *al-Risālat al-Laduniyya* (1938).

Most of the Sūfīs mentioned in the discussion have explained the knowledge as esoteric or unseen knowledge or *‘ilm ladunī*, which is bestowed to Khidr without an intermediary. This is considered as substantial evidence proving that, according to medieval Sūfīs, saints can be inspired with such knowledge without an intermediary like Khidr, who is also a saint. This is because saints have gained a spiritual level that allows them to receive knowledge directly from God. This spiritual rank is achieved by worshipping God. It begins with worshipping God until they reach the highest spiritual level where they can establish a direct connection with God. This means that it is also possible for saints to be like Khidr in regard to his knowledge.

However, the study showed that there are critical responses found with ‘Abd-ar-Raḥmān Ibn-‘Alī Ibn al-Jauzī (d.1201) in his book *the Kitāb Talbīs Iblīs the Book of the Devil’s Deception*, with Abu ‘Abdullah al-Qurṭubī (d.1273) in his *tafsīr*, and with Ibn Taymīyah (d.1328). They have argued that such knowledge cannot be gained without an intermediary, because it is considered the only way to judge this kind of knowledge. However, both Ibn al-Jauzī and Ibn Taymīyah do not deny the possibility of inspiration but they insist that such knowledge cannot be gained except through following the teachings of the Prophets, which mean that there must be an intermediary.

According to the discussion, Sūfīs justify this by the division of the knowledge into esoteric knowledge, which is limited to saints only and the prophets do not share in it, and exoteric knowledge, which can be known by both Prophets and saints. This is rejected by both Ibn al-Jauzī and Ibn Taymīyah and it is considered by them to be another concern because if we

assume that Khidr's knowledge is esoteric, this would mean that Moses' knowledge is exoteric, therefore, are they contradictory, or can inspiration contradict the revelation?

Because of this, Ibn Taymīyah (1987, p.85) argued that there could be nothing in the story of Khidr that proves that there is an unseen or esoteric knowledge that other people do not know. In addition, they are aware of the reasons that Moses did not share the knowledge that Khidr had. For example, his knowledge about the ship of poor people and there being ahead of it an unfair king are matters which others can know. Furthermore, the wall that belonged to two youths, who were orphans in the town, was something that others could have been aware of. According to the Ḥadīth text, Khidr said to Moses, "I have some of God's knowledge which He has bestowed upon me but you do not know it; and you too, have some of God's knowledge which He has bestowed upon you, but I do not know it" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Vol. 2, Book 21, Ḥadīth 263). This account shows that both Moses and Khidr have particular knowledge that the other one does not share. This seems to prove that neither of them knows the unseen or esoteric knowledge, except what is bestowed on them by God. Therefore, how could Sūfīs have claimed that Khidr has known the esoteric knowledge, while at the same time Khidr himself admits that Moses has knowledge that he did not have or know? Therefore, this analysis according to Ibn Taymīyah supports the view that Khidr is a prophet, and the knowledge that is bestowed on him is simply a revelation from God, similar to other prophets and messengers.

However, al-Rāzī disagrees and argued that "This deduction (*istidlāl*) is weak", as there is a necessary knowledge (*'ulūm kasbiyya*) which can be inspired to non-Prophets without an intermediary. This kind of knowledge according to al-Rāzī (1995 p.150) can be acquired by two methods. One of the methods is called "consideration (*naẓar*), reflection (*tafakkur*), pondering (*tadabbur*), contemplation (*ta'ammul*), deliberation (*tarawwin*), or deduction (*istidlāl*)". The other method is by (*riyāḍāt*) and efforts (*mujāhadāt*). Al-Rāzī maintains that '*ilm ladunī*' is among the

types of knowledge that are acquired (*'ulūm kasbiyya*). This means it is not limited to prophets and it can be gained without an intermediary.

The study concluded that al-Rāzī refers to the same path that is mentioned by al-Ghazālī and Maybudī for acquiring such knowledge. However, Ibn Taymīyah has evaluated this method by saying that Sūfis argued that “it is possible for men who practice spiritual exercises, purification of the heart, and development of the soul by means of praiseworthy characteristics, to know this kind of knowledge”. In fact, Ibn Taymīyah admits that there is a relationship between practice and knowledge, which is unlike Ibn al-Jauzī, who has rejected “the entire notion of esoteric knowledge”. However, Ibn Taymīyah (1987, p.283) has argued that the theory of perfection that is employed by the Sūfis as a method to gain such knowledge is a philosophical theory.

At this point, the recent scholarship of Kristin Zahra Sands (2006, p.85) has also engaged in the relevant discussion and supports Ibn Taymīyah’s argument that the theory of perfection is derived from philosophy. However, this differs with the recent work of Diego Sarrio who refers to an important point in this context, which is frequently found in Ibn Taymīyah's writings, and it has not been referenced by Kristin Sands. Sarrio argued that Ibn Taymīyah has contradicted himself regarding the relationship between the Sūfī method and philosophy. He puts forth that Ibn Taymīyah has mentioned in another place that “later philosophers, such as Ibn Sīna (Avicenna, d.1037), tried to reconcile Greek philosophy with the Prophetic message. They adopted some principles from the Islamic rationalist theologians and created a doctrine acceptable to the philosophers of the various religions” (Sarrio, 2011, p.284). It can be seen that Ibn Taymīyah has acknowledged that the philosophers have created an acceptable method, which is unlike what Ibn Taymīyah mentioned above. Therefore, Sarrio (2011, p.284) argued that “this doctrine, however, contains a great deal of corruption and self-contradiction”. This also may explain the manner in which Sarrio evaluated Ibn Taymīyah’s conclusion that saints’ inspiration must be considered against the revelation. Sarrio (2011, p.284) maintains that this is because Ibn Taymīyah “was

particularly concerned with what he saw as a prevalent mistake among his contemporaries, namely the blind acceptance of everything that the supposed friends of God said or did, even when it contradicted the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth". In fact, even Sands, who supports Ibn Taymīyah's argument, refers to such a point by saying that "although all the Sūfī commentators studied here understood *'ilm ladunī* as a kind of knowledge that might be received by the rare individual, none of them addressed the issue of whether these individuals, like Khidr, are entitled or even obliged to follow a different set of rules than the common believer. But apparently, there were those who did propose such an argument" (Sands, 2006, p.86). This is possibly what led to concern about this belief. However, the thesis concluded that Sarrio made a strong argument in this regard, but still, there is the question of how to judge such knowledge that is gained without an intermediary. This is because there is an individual method that is known as the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān. This method and the way that is used to judge such knowledge by Sūfīs was addressed and thoroughly analysed in the next chapter (The symbolism of Khidr's knowledge in Sūfī exegesis: The Qur'ānic Story of Khidr as Model).

In this chapter, the discussion concentrated on the relationship between the knowledge of Khidr and the Sūfī method of interpretation on one hand, and how Sūfīs have applied such knowledge in their interpretation books on the other hand. This was conducted through providing the interpretation of the story itself as a model by three significant medieval Sūfī interpretations that give a unique account of the story of Khidr and offer different perspectives. The three accounts included al-Qushayrī's (d.1072) *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, Maybudī (d. 1126) *Kashf al-asrār wa- 'uddat al-Abrār*, and al-Kāshānī (d. 1329), *Tafsīr al-Kāshānī*.

The discussion showed that the first mention of such method in the text of the Qur'ān is in the story of Moses and Khidr, which took place during their journey. Khidr performs three strange acts, and Moses asks him about these acts; Khidr gives Moses their esoteric explanation. After

Khidr explained all of his actions, he concluded that he had not done anything of his own accord, but had followed God's instructions.

In addition, the study showed that most medieval Sūfī interpreters have interpreted the case of Khidr, who is considered by them as a saint (*walī*), as his possessing the esoteric knowledge inspired in him by God without an intermediary and this enabled him to explain the three actions by their deeper or inner meaning. This understanding led medieval Sūfī interpreters to have claimed that they gain Khidr's knowledge in the same way in order to unveil the deeper and hidden meaning of Qur'ānic verses, which according to them, is the main purpose of the meaning of the text of the Qur'ān, as exemplified by Khidr's knowledge. This illustrates the relationship between the Qur'ānic story of Khidr and this method of medieval Sūfī interpretation on one hand and the relationship between such knowledge and medieval Sūfī interpretation on the other hand. As a result, the story has not only validated the Sūfī method of interpretation, but it is also considered as proof that the main purpose of the meaning of the Qur'ān is its inner meaning. It is also inferred from the story that such knowledge of a hidden meaning can be imparted based on the situation of Khidr.

The discussion moves to answer an important question in this regard, which is how we can evaluate and judge such knowledge? It was found that, according to Sūfīs "such knowledge cannot be taught but can only be obtained by the purification (*taṣfiya*) of the soul and the disengagement (*tajrīd*) of the heart from corporeal attachments. This process is illustrated by the allegorical interpretation of Khidr's actions" (Sands, 2006, p.94). This process of purification (*taṣfiya*) may be considered as an evaluation of the person who has such knowledge. This was confirmed in the comparative analysis of the three medieval Sūfī interpretations of the story of Khidr, which demonstration this process of purification and its relationship to the story, on one hand and the nature of such knowledge on the other hand.

The study showed that the first to have introduced this theory of purification to Sūfī belief is the early Sūfī mystic al-Hallāj, who refers to the process of attaining perfection not in the events of the story themselves but when explaining the reasons behind the events that happened during the journey of Moses to Khidr. Medieval Sūfīs have created a new belief according to this understanding; it is the master-disciple relationship. More clearly, the events that happened between Khidr and Moses in the story have been taken as a model and an example to demonstrate the master-disciple relationship in Sūfī belief. Sūfīs have explained the reasons behind this belief by saying that students shall not doubt anything mentioned by their masters. This is because Sūfī masters, *Sheikhs*, have secret, esoteric knowledge. Disciples should consider what had happened between Moses and Khidr, as Moses made a mistake by decrying Khidr, who was acting according to esoteric knowledge.

The discussion showed that the belief of the master-disciple relationship may have become established in the classical period but was only developed in the Medieval Age. This might have been due to the absence of an explicit reference to the master-disciple relationship in the text of both the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth. However, it is found in the recent scholarship of Hugh Talat Halman (2013) that, there are some motifs in the Ḥadīth text that can be taken as indicators of the master-disciple relationship. They are “Moses’ journey with Khidr as a precedent for seeking knowledge with diligence and humility, also Moses’ journey teaches the importance of persevering in gaining knowledge and remembering that all knowledge belongs to God”.

Another motif mentioned in the Ḥadīth is that: “Khidr is covered in a garment (*musaja’ bi-thawb*)”. According to Halman (2013) “this motif of the garment (*thawb*) is adopted in Sūfī hagiography as the mantle of initiation (*khirqā*)”. Halman (2013) adds that this is especially so in the case of Ibn ‘Arabī, who considered the garment of Khidr (*khirqā*) to be mentoring companionship (*ṣuḥba*) itself. There are multiple relationships to this belief mentioned by Halman: the Ḥadīth's indication to this belief on one hand, and Ibn ‘Arabī’s (2002, p.199)

linkage of this indication to the belief on the other hand. Contrary to this understanding the relatively recent work of Ian Richard Netton (1992, pp.1-22) takes the position that Ibn ‘Arabī has illustrated the relationship between Moses and Khidr in the story as a “mutual agreement, rather than failure on Moses’s part, should be construed to mean that while Khidr is the “Supreme Master,” Khidr and Moses were not engaged in a master-disciple relationship: “there is no Master/Pupil relationship here in Ibn ‘Arabī’s text in which Khidr is the Supreme Master””. In Netton’s clarification of Ibn ‘Arabī’s explanation of this belief he refers to an important point, and that is that Moses was not engaged in a master-disciple relationship in the story. Moses rejection of the three actions that happened in the story would mean that Moses was a failure according to this belief. This brings about the question of how the story could demonstrate the master-disciple relationship. Halman (2013) evaluated Netton’s argument by saying that “‘mutuality’ is only one aspect of Ibn ‘Arabī’s treatment of the relationship and the separation. An alternative reading of Ibn ‘Arabī’s discussion suggests that Khidr defers to Moses’s status as apostle, out of respect for Moses’s office, not as an endorsement of Moses’s decision to affect their separation”. The thesis concluded that this debate, in fact, may be a result of the primary focus of this belief being centred upon Khidr as a teacher instead of Moses as a student.

The discussion of the comparative analysis of the three medieval Sūfī interpretations of the story of Khidr showed that Sūfī mentioned in the section have not referred to some important issues associated with Khidr, and discussed in Chapter 2, such as the nature of Khidr and the water of life, although their belief is that Khidr is still alive and he is a saint.

The most noticeable point in al-Qushayrī’s interpretation of Khidr’s actions is the use of two levels of interpretation: esoteric and exoteric, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. This means he does not reject the literal meaning of the Qur’ān, at least on this point, which may make more sense in understanding Khidr’s actions. However, this is unlike how both Maybudī and al-Kāshānī interpret the three actions, which are represented for them as a map of the concept of the Perfect Man (*al-Insān al-kāmel*).

According to Maybudī, the story's elements (such as characters and events) have been used "As symbolic indicators of the stages of the soul in its progress towards attaining knowledge of higher realities" (Sands, 2006, p.91). The first action, the boat, represents "The poverty that one must embrace in order to escape the notice of Satan who is attracted to prosperity and the outward display of one's religion." (Sands, 2006, p.91). The second action, the boy who is killed by Khidr, refers to "The desires and opinions that rear their heads in the field of spiritual discipline (*riyāḍa*), and the struggle (*mujāhada*) that must be cut off because this (offspring) will become a disbeliever as it grows" (Sands, 2006, p.91). The last action, the wall rebuilt by Khidr, is "an allusion to the soul at peace (*al-naḥs al-muṭma'innah*) that must not be destroyed. The purpose of the spiritual effort is to purify the soul, not annihilate it, for the Prophet said, "Your soul has a right over you" (Sands, 2006, p.91).

As for al-Kāshānī, the process of attaining perfection goes through three stages. The first stage is the inner journey to gain knowledge and understanding of the secrets of the unseen world, which corresponds to Moses' journey in search of Khidr, which in turn represents the seeker of spiritual reality. The second stage represents the destruction of the body, which refers to revealing the unseen. Ibn 'Arabī (n.d, p.223) states that the ship is your soul, and you should be pierced by effort (*majahūd*) to join your separate souls with the united single divine soul; the body then becomes a metaphor for the truth. It should be noted that he refers to the ship that is broken by Khidr. The third stage is the wall that was rebuilt by Khidr, which represents reaching the stage of the unveiling (*Kashf*).

It is worth saying here that this explains al-Kāshānī's belief that Khidr is a holy being, and receives inspiration directly from God without mediation, which leads him to know esoteric knowledge. This inspiration is understood as a kind of revelation (*waḥī*) that is not restricted to the Prophets and it is indicative of the saints' *al-walāya*, *status*. According to this, religious laws are separated between the esoteric (*bāṭin*), and exterior (*ẓāhir*) interpretation, where Khidr represented the

esoteric (*bāṭin*) and the Prophet Moses represented the exterior (*ẓāhir*). Therefore, every Qur’ānic verse (according to them) has two meanings: the exoteric, for oral recitation, and the esoteric, for interior comprehension (Elias, 2010, p.42).

On the one hand, this analysis demonstrates the relationship between the Sūfī method of interpretation and the story of Khidr; on the other hand it presents a sample of this technique of Sūfī interpretation, which is entirely inconsistent with the exoteric interpretation. However, it can be noted that there is an inconsistency in the way the aforementioned interpretations use this method, at least when it comes to explaining Khidr’s actions. This shows that both Maybudī and al-Kāshānī have exclusively used allegory to interpret the actions in the story. This is in contrast to al-Qushayrī, who uses both exoteric and esoteric interpretations to deal with the actions. There are similarities between the interpretations of Maybudī and al-Kāshānī, but Maybudī is considered more cautious when it comes to emphasizing the role of the Sūfī master in the process of attaining perfection. There is a difference, in relation to the process of attaining perfection described in the story, between both Maybudī and al-Kāshānī. For example, Maybudī interprets ‘the sea’ as the sea of recognition and describes it by saying: “Each of the one hundred and twenty-odd thousand centre points of sinlessness dived into that sea with his community and people in the hope that from that sea they would gather the pearls of *tawḥīd* in the skirt of seeking,” for “He who recognizes himself has recognized his Lord” (2014, p.476). As for al-Kāshānī, he refers to: “The meeting-point of the two worlds, the world of the spirit and the world of the body, which constitute the sweet and the salty within the form of mankind and at the station of the heart, though I march on for ages,’—that is, [though] I march for a long time” (n.d, p.488).

The last chapter provides a novel exploration of Khidr’s symbolism in medieval Sūfī literature. This chapter aimed to present the impact of the figure Khidr on medieval Sūfī literature or those who were impacted by Sūfī heritage. This was conducted through focusing on two sections:

- 1) Khidr' symbolism in Sūfī poetry.
- 2) Khidr' symbolism in Sūfī prose.

This chapter showed that the figure of Khidr is ubiquitous in Arabic poetry and hundreds of poetic verses mention Khidr, either describing his meeting with Moses, the water of life, esoteric knowledge or other imagery. The first sign of Khidr in Arabic poetry may be found in the Umayyad poet Qays Ibn al-Mulawwah's poem (d.687), known as "Possessed by Madness for Laylā" (*Majnūn Laylā*).

The discussion of Sūfī poetry in this regard was centred upon three major medieval Sūfī poets: Aṭṭār (d. 1222), Rūmī (d. 1237) and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240).

The study showed that Khidr has been found in different places in the accounts of Aṭṭār; including two famous epics: *Ilāhī-Nāma* (*Book of the Divine*) and *Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr* (*Conference of the Birds*).

Three poems related to Khidr are mentioned in *Ilāhī-Nāma* (*Book of the Divine*), all of which are in the context of replying to the fourth son who asked, as mentioned, about the water of life which is one of the story's elements. The poems are:

- 1) In Praise of the Prophet
- 2) Invocation of the Spirit
- 3) Story of the Virtuous Woman Whose Husband Had Gone on a Journey.

The discussion showed that the water of life, which the fourth son who asked about,, represents immortality and, according to Aṭṭār, the inner meaning of the water of life is in different aspects: first, God-gift to Khidr; second, the meeting of Khidr where the two seas meet which is the place where Moses found Khidr as mentioned in the Qur'ānic text; third, the esoteric knowledge; and fourth, the context of poetry love (*ghazal*).

In the *Conference of the Birds* (*Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr*): Aṭṭār refers to Khidr in the context of searching for the water of life, however, the poem shows that "In the search for God, the genuine seeker

should renounce everything. Even the water of life and all that it stands for; the individuated consciousness must not become the goal” (Sviri, 2001, p.5).

This is how Khidr is represented in Attar’s account, which shows that the continuity of the representation of Khidr in religious genres is widely reflected in literary materials during the Medieval Period.

Khidr has also been found in different places in the account of Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* book, which gives a unique account of the figure of Khidr. *Mathnawī* has about 26,000 verses divided into six books, all of which are considered “a spiritual writing that teaches Sūfis how to reach their goal of being in true love with God” (Williams, 2006, p.34). One of these lessons was the story of Moses and Khidr, which comes in four poems:

- 1) The Prophet’s Counsels to Ali to Follow the Direction of the Pir or Spiritual Guide, and to Endure his Chastisements Patiently
- 2) Ali, the Lion of God
- 3) The Man Whose Calling ‘O God’ Was Equivalent to God’s Answering Him ‘Here Am I’
- 4) Teachings on the Friend of God’s Relationship to law *sharī‘a*.

The study shows that Rūmī illustrates through the story the rules of the master-disciple relationship. It also mentions the water of life, which is considered the path of spiritual immortality, and the God-gift to the saint, Khidr. Rūmī also understood from the God-gift to Khidr that saints can be successors to the prophets. Not only this, but it can also be understood from the poems that Khidr is a saviour, who comes in the appropriate time to solve problems, especially those that are related to the relationship between God and his servants. In Rūmī’s opinion, this is the main aim of the meeting of Khidr.

Khidr is also found in the account of Ibn ‘Arabī, who primarily focused on his meeting with Khidr. His account demonstrates that Khidr selects the saints, and gives them the *khirqā*, which is a highly

dignified stage. This means Khidr's role is that of a teacher, as has been shown in the Qur'ān. There is also an important point in that Ibn 'Arabī clearly confirmed that he has met and seen Khidr and he believes that Khidr is still alive, which seems to have been so widely discussed. The story of Khidr is also used to prove that saints are different from other people, as saints are the most knowledgeable, of the highest state, and the most aware of the news of all other people. It can be also understood that the one who meets Khidr has reached a higher level of piety (God-fear). The study also draws attention to the language that is used in the meeting between Ibn 'Arabī and Khidr, which is according to the recent scholarship of Halman is "language of spiritual states," and adds that Ibn 'Arabi "was addressed by Khidr in Khidr's own language serves to express both the idea of Khidr's knowledge as intelligent discourse and the inexpressibility of its distinctive dimension. As a language it is intelligible; as Khidr's special language it is reserved as the privilege of the spiritual elite (*khāṣṣ*)" (2013, p.108). This shows that Ibn 'Arabī is among those few who deemed themselves to be able to understand the knowledge of Khidr which Moses himself could not understand. In addition, Ibn 'Arabī believes that saints can receive the *khirqā* from Khidr, which is considered a symbol of a higher level of piety.

Overall, Khidr can be placed within the tradition of Sūfī literature in the following ways:

Poets either see Khidr as a teacher, or they produce educational poems that explain the Qur'ānic story's dimensions, or confirm the behaviour of a disciple to their sheikh, such as not being insistent or challenging. Poets also take Khidr as a proof of the fascination of poetry love (*ghazal*), through relying on the story's elements: the spring of life, darkness, greenness, beauty and eternity. Some other poets employ Khidr to express their spiritual states and their *maqāmāt*, as we have seen for Ibn 'Arabī.

The poets in favour of Khidr's immortality outnumber those that oppose it. This is because his survival is more attractive than the alternative since the marvel is seen to be Khidr's travels and his sudden appearances, before disappearing again.

The poets' interest in Khidr and their employing him in their poems reflect the critical situation of man regarding life and death, passing away and eternity. The tale of Khidr's survival and his drinking of the water of life/eternity, are but the desire of man to find that spring, which is an unrealisable dream that nevertheless we do not stop searching for. It is the longing for the impossibility of eternity. This indicates that there is a link between literary myths and symbols on the one hand and the human mind on the other.

The figure of Khidr is also found in prose, in different aspects:

- 1) Khidr in folk literature: In this part, the study has presented two folk stories. The first is the story of prince Mahbūb. The second is the story of *Buluqiya*.
- 2) Khidr in short stories: This part was presented three stories by three medieval Sūfī saints: 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Aṭṭār and Ibn 'Arabī.
- 3) Travellers and Khidr: This part was presented some of the mausoleums and shrines dedicated to Khidr, which are found throughout the Islamic world.

Overall, Khidr in folk literature has been used as a saviour and hero especially in very hard and risky times. In short stories, Khidr is usually connected with the elements of his story, such as knowledge and the water of life. Khidr is also usually the major character in these tales. Travellers have also paid attention to the journeys of Khidr, especially the town that is visited by Moses and Khidr in their story.

The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature:

First, there is a third resource which, along with the Qur'ān and Sunna, is used by Sūfīs to understand Khidr, which is the tales, narrations and transmitted reports about Khidr. This resource extends our knowledge about the role of Khidr. For example, Khidr is still alive and meets with saints to answer their questions, solve their problems, and protect them. Not only this, but Khidr has also performed miracles, such as walking on water without his feet getting wet. Khidr also

knows what is on one's mind and discusses it and respects the Saints and advocates for them against those who deny miracles. Although it is difficult to evaluate such narrations, these narratives have strongly affected the medieval Sūfī understanding of the figure of Khidr. Second: The question of the superiority of saints over prophets was started with al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and fully developed in the thirteenth century by Ibn ‘Arabī. However, the thesis concluded that this analysis still does not establish the possibility of superiority of a saint over a prophet, as both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and Ibn ‘Arabī have not explicitly claimed that saints can be of a higher rank than prophets although they argued that Khidr is more knowledgeable than Moses in the story.

Third: This research provides a novel exploration of the effect of the figure Khidr in Medieval Sūfī literature.

In fact, the associations of the figure of Khidr with Jewish lore as the Prophet Elijah, in Christian tradition as Saint George, Georgius or Mar Georges, and in Islamic tradition as Khidr, make the personage of Khidr a suitable topic for a comparative study in religion. However, the limitation of this present effort prohibits a thorough investigation of the entangled threads surrounding the related questions of the origin of Khidr, which are much more accessible to historical textual and oral analysis and comparison.

Appendix 1

Interpretations of the story of Khidr by the three medieval Sūfī interpretations mentioned in chapter 3 section 2.

- 1) Abū'l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Kārim b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, ed. Ibrahim Basyuni (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 1968 vol. 3). The story of Moses and Khidr is translated by Hugh Talat Halman. In his book *Where the Two Seas Meet. The Qur’ānic Story of al-Khidr and Moses in Sūfī Commentaries as a Model for Spiritual Guidance*. Fons Vitae. pp 107-14.

Al-Qushayrī’s interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr 18:60-82:

(Q18 60:61) “Moses said to his servant, ‘I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years! But when they reached the place where the two seas meet, they had forgotten all about their fish, which made its way into the sea and swam away”.

When the companionship of Joshua with Moses was confirmed, then he deserved the title of *al-futuwwa* (noble servanthood)”. As it says and when Moses said to his young servant (*fatāhu*)...” it is name bestowed for honor (*karāma*), not as a designation (*‘alāma*). He “God made the entrance of the fish into the water as a marker (*‘alāma*) for finding Khidr. There he made forgetfulness enter into both [Moses and Joshua] so that it might extend (*ablughā*) the sing (*āyā*) and place it beyond human choice.

(Q18:62) They journeyed on, and then Moses said to his servant, ‘Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring”.

Moses was burdened (*mutahammal*) in this journey. It had been a journey of moral training (*ta’dīb*) and the endurance of hardship. This is because he went to increase his knowledge. The state (*hāl*) of seeking knowledge is a state of moral training and a time of enduring (*taḥammul*) hardship. And for this [reason] he was stricken by hunger. Thus he [Moses] said “we had encountered on our journey [at] this [point] fatigue”. (18:62) [On mount Sinai] when he fasted during the period of waiting to hear the divine speech, he was patient for thirty

days and he was not stricken by hunger and hardship. Since his travel was to God, he was carried along [i.e., sustained].

(Q18:63:64): “and [the servant] said, ‘Remember when we were resting by the rock? I forgot the fish– Satan made me forget to pay attention to it– and it [must have] made its way into the sea.’ ‘How strange!’ Moses said, ‘Then that was the place we were looking for.’ So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps”.

Their journey was prolonged because they needed to turn away from their place. Then Joshus said, “it was only Satan that caused me forget to mention [it]”. (18:63) God, may He glorified, made forgetfulness enter him so that fishing would be one of his burdens. Moses said “this is what we were seeking” (18:64). This means the entrance of the fish into water, [even though the fish] was grilled. And that became for him [Moses] a miracle. When they arrived at the place where the fish entered the water, they encountered Khidr.

(Q18:65) “And found one of Our servants– a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own”.

When God designates a person as His servant, then it makes him among the elect of the elect [*jumlat min khāṣṣ al-khawass*]. When he said “my servant [‘*abdī*’] he indeed made him among the elect of the elect.

“... A man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own”. That is, he was bestowed with compassion (*marḥūm*) from our direction through that *rahma* reserved especially for him from Us. From this Khidr was bestowed with compassion, and with it he will bestow mercy upon Our servants.

“We had given knowledge of Our own” (18:65). It is said that this knowledge is from the realm (*ladun*) of God, that which is acquired by way of (*bi-ṭarīqī*) divine inspiration (*ilhām*) without intentional effort. It is also said that it is that by which god (*al-ḥaqq*) makes known the elect from among His servants. It is said that it is that by which through its righteousness (*ṣalāh*) God (*al-ḥaqq*) makes known His saints (*awliyā*) from among His servants.

And it is said that it [‘*ilm al-ladunnī*’] is that which gives no benefit to its possessor (*ṣaḥīb*). Rather, its benefit is to His servants from what he possesses of God’s truth (*ḥaqq*), may he be glorified. And it is said that it is the thing which its possessor (*ṣaḥīb*) will not be able to deny. And evidence (*dalīl*) for the validity of what he discovers [*through* ‘*ilm al-ladunnī*’] is

uncounted to it. If you were to ask him concerning proof (*burhān*) he would which lies beyond proof (*daʿīl*).

(Q18:66) “Moses said to him, ‘May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?’”.

He showed discretion (*talattufa*) in his address by taking the way of asking permission. Then Moses openly explained his intention (*maqṣūd*) toward companionship (*ṣuḥba*), the Qur’ānic says “...May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?’

And it is said that the knowledge for which Khidr was not taught to him by a teacher, nor for a person. So if no one has taught him, then how would be able to teach it to another?

(Q18:67-70) “The man said, ‘You will not be able to bear with me patiently. How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?’ Moses said, ‘God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way.’ The man said, ‘If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself’”.

A question on that side and an answer on this side! So he Khidr discerned (*tadarak*) his heart in his saying “How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?” (Q18:68). And Moses answered “.... You will find me...” (Q18:69) from the soul (*nafs*) of Moses are enumerated two things: **1**) patience (*ṣabr*) and **2**) that he will not disobey what he [Khidr] commands. As for patience (*ṣabr*), he linked it with seeking the will of God (*istinshāʾ*). And he said “God willing, you will find me patient” (Q18:69). And he was patient as long as he was found to be one who is patient. In doing this he did not restrict Khidr’s hands, in terms of [limiting] his action.

As for the second statement “I will not disobey you in [any] order” (Q18:69). He declared it independently and did not connect it to seeking the will of God. And he did not betray what he sought [with God’s will]. And what was declared independently became a [point of] difference (*khulf*).

God says “He [Khidr] said, “If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself” (18:70). the disciple (*murīd*) does not [have the right] to say “no” to his master (*shaykh*), nor the pupil (*tilmīdh*) to his teacher, nor the lay person to the learned

jurisprudent (*al-‘alim al-muftī*) in his rendering of legal determinations (*yafta’*) and judgments (*yuḥakime*).

(Q18:71) “They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, Moses said, ‘How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!’”.

God statements “to drown its passengers?” (18:71) this means, the outcome of this deed will lead to the drowning of its people, for he knew that this was not done with the purpose of drowning the people in the boat.

(Q18:72). “He [Khidr] said did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me” That is, you are looking at this from the point of view of knowledge. We are proceeding from the point of view of divine commandment (*ḥukm*).

(18:73) ““Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?””.

He appeals to Khidr with the stipulation of knowledge (*sharṭ al-‘ilm*) in saying “do not blame me that I forgot.” because one who forgets is not held responsible (*taklīf*).

And one who is capable of having rights is under obligation (*takīlf*). but one who is not sound in action and exempt (*tark*) is not faced [with blame]. The person who forgets is of this category.

(Q18:74) " And so they travelled on. Then, when they met a young boy and the man killed him, Moses said, ‘How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!’”

It was in the nature of knowledge (*khulūq al-‘ilm*) and incumbent upon Moses. His shortcoming was inevitable: he sees injustice on the surface (*ẓāhir*). But concerning that which he knew from the state of Khidr, it was within his right to stop until he had determined whether it was prohibited (*maḥẓūr*) or permissible (*mubāḥ*). It was the overturning of the norm (*qalaba al-‘āda*).

(Q18:75) “He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’” Because he [Moses] stopped at the condition of knowledge (*sharṭ al-‘ilm*). But on the contrary it has to do with the state of unveliling (*kashf*), so Moses imposed conditions (*sharāṭ*) on him, saying, “Moses said, ‘From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me

from your company—you have put up with enough from me.” (19:76). He showed his disobedience three times. Since three is the outer limit of few and the inner limit of many, he could not find any kind of forgiveness after that.

(Q18:77). “And so they travelled on. Then, when they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down and the man repaired it. Moses said, ‘But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that’.

It was incumbent upon the people of the village, based on their religious community (*milla*) that they should feed them [moses and Khidr]. Moses did not know there would be no use in reproaching them. It would have been better had he disregarded it. So when Khidr raised their wall and did not ask for a reward (*ajr*), moses did not tell him, “you have done something prohibited, but he said to him, “if you had wished you could have taken a reward”. That is, “if you Khidr do not take it for your sake, [then] if you were to take it for our sake, your taking it would be better for us than leaving it. If they are entitled to their rights; then why did you forsake our rights?”

And it is said that his (Moses) travel was a journey of moral training (*ta’dīb*) so it was repeated to make him endure hardship (*mashq*). Except when he gave drink to the daughters of *Shu‘ayb*, what struck him of exhaustion and hunger was greater. At that time, he could bear it and it was bearable. And when moses said that, Khidr said to him “He said, ‘This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently’” (Q18:78).

That is, after this, “then there is no companionship (*ṣuḥba*) between us”.

And It is said that Khidr said, “you are indeed a prophet however, whatever compels you in when I said, you are obligated (*sharaṭṭa*) by the stipulations [of knowledge] (*sharṭ*) [as] you said, if I ask you about anything after this, then do not keep companionship with me. Nonetheless I am acting on your statement”. And it is said when moses did not remain patient with him in refraining from asking, Khidr was also not patient with him in continuing [their] companionship and Khidr chose separation (*firāq*).

And it is said that as long as Moses asked on behalf of other-in the matter of the boat which was no behalf of the poor ones and the killing of the soul without right (*ḥaqq*), Khidr did not separate from him. When he spoke the third time, in seeking a gift of food for himself, he

was afflicted in separation. So Khidr said to him, “this is the parting between me and you”. And it is said just as Moses desired the companionship (*ṣuḥab*) of Khidr for the purpose of increasing [his]knowledge, Khidr desired to leave the *ṣuḥab* of moses, from his propensity for seclusion (*khalwa*) with god [apart] from the created ones.

(Q18:79) “The boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force”.

When Khidr parted from Moses, Khidr did not want (*lam yurid*) there to remain (*yabqā*) in Moses’ heart even a semblance of objection (*shibhu al-i’tirād*). So he removed that from his heart with what he clarified to him of his state (*ḥāl*). He unveiled (*kashafa*) to him that the secret of his intention in damaging the boat was its wholeness (*salamatuha*) and its preservation (*baqā`uha*) for its people so thsat the usurping king would not have any desire for it. And the preservation of the boat for its people while it was defective was better for them then if it were whole in the hands of the usurping king.

(Q18:80-81) “The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief, we wished that their Lord should give them another child– purer and more compassionate– in his place”.

He clarified to him that the killing of the youth, because it had already been made known and decreed by god as a commandment (*ḥukm*) that this continuing to live would be a trial (*fiṭna*) for his parents, and that the exchange of a replacement (*khalāf*) for him would be a happiness for them.

(Q18:82) “The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience”.

As for the repairing of the wall, it was for the purpose of making permanent (*istibqā`*) the treasure of the two youths [which involves] ceasing to seek friendship (*rifq*) from creatures (*khalq*).

- 2) Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. 1126) *Kashf al-asrār wa-‘uddat al-Abrār*, The unveiling of the mysteries and the provision of the pious. Translated by William C. Chittick. (2014) vol.1. The *Kashf al-asrar* has sometimes been called the Tafsīr of *Khwājā Abd Allāh al-Ansāri* but, in fact, *al-Ansāri* is only one of the sources al-Maybudī used in the third part of his Tafsīr.

Maybudī’s interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr 18:60-82:

The fourth journey of Moses was the journey of toil. This is an allusion to the journey of the desirers at the beginning of desire, the journey of discipline and of tolerating the hardship of the rectification of three things: the soul, the disposition, and the heart.

The rectification of the soul is three things: bringing it from complaint to gratitude, from heedlessness to wakefulness, and from foolishness to awareness. The rectification of the disposition is three things: You come forth from annoyance to patience, from niggardliness to free giving, and from retribution to pardon. The rectification of the heart is three things: You come forth from the ruins of feeling secure to fear, from the calamity of despair to the blessing of hope, and from the tribulation of the heart’s scatteredness to the heart’s freedom.

The material of this rectification is three things: following knowledge, permitted food, and constant devotions. Its fruit is three things: a secret core adorned with awareness of the Patron, a spirit lit up with the love of eternity, and knowledge from God found without intermediary. This is why the Lord of the Worlds honors Khidr and says about him:

(Q18:65) “Our servants– a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own”.

“When someone is able to sacrifice his attributes to the holy law *sharī‘a*, We will engrave the secrets of the knowledges of the *ḥaqīqah* on his heart: And We taught him knowledge from Us.” The one who speaks of this knowledge is the realizer, who speaks from finding. Light is apparent from his words, familiarity on his face, and servanthood in his conduct. A lightning flash of the Greatest Light has shone in his heart, the lamp of his recognition has been lit, and the unseen secrets have been unveiled to him. Such was Khidr in the work of the ship, the boy, and the wall.

Take care not to have the opinion that Khidr was greater than Moses the Speaking

Companion, even if Moses was sent to Khidr's grammar school. No, of course not, for in the Court of Inaccessibility, after Muṣṭafā no prophet has the same joyful expansiveness and proximity as Moses. Nonetheless, He made Khidr the furnace of Moses' discipline. Thus, when someone wants to take silver to pureness, he puts it in a fiery furnace. This is because of the superiority of silver over the fiery furnace, not because of the superiority of fire and furnace over silver.

Then there are Khidr's words,

(Q18:67) "You will not be able to bear with me patiently".

The meaning according to true understanding is this allusion: "O Moses, the secret core of your disposition so much expansiveness from the marks giving witness to the Divinity that you say, 'Show me that I may gaze upon Thee!' (7:143). I who am Khidr do not have the power and strength to pass these words over my heart or to busy my thoughts with them. Your ruling authority will not be able to put up with the grief of my deprivation. Surely thou wilt not be able to bear patiently with me."

As for the breaking the ship in the sea, killing the boy, and repairing the wall, each of these, in keeping with the understanding of the Folk of Findings, alludes to a great principle. It is said that the sea is the sea of recognition. Each of the one hundred twenty-some thousand center points of sinlessness dove into that sea with his community and people in the hope that from that sea they would gather the pearls of tawḥīd in the skirt of seeking, for "He who recognizes himself has recognized his Lord."

The ship is the ship of human nature. Khidr wanted to ruin and break that ship with the hand of tenderness, for the owners of the ship were "indigent" [*miskīn*], and their attribute was "tranquility" [*sakīna*]. The Court of Eternity had addressed them with these words: "He it is who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the faithful" (48:4). When Muṣṭafā saw the Real's selfdisclosure of Majesty to the hearts of the indigent, he said, "O God, give me life as an indigent, give me death as an indigent, and muster me among the indigent!" When Khidr ruined the ship of mortal nature with the hand of tenderness, Moses saw that outwardly it was adorned and flourishing with the ornament of the law *sharī'a* and the *ṭarīqa*. He said, "How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers?" (18:71). Khidr responded, "I knew that coming after them was a king [18:79]: Behind its flourishing was a

king, a Satan who had prepared the ambush of severity in the neighborhood of the ship so that he might take the ship with his severity and deception and travel in it by night and day, for ‘Satan runs in the children of Adam like blood.’ We took away this adornment and flourishing with the hand of tenderness so that, when Satan comes like a king, he will see it ruined outwardly, and he will not come near it.”

As for the boy whom Khidr killed and Moses’ disavowal of the act, this is an allusion to the wishes and fancies that stick up their heads from a man’s makeup in the playing field of discipline and the crucible of struggle. He said, “I have been commanded to strike off the head of everything not related to faith with the sword of jealousy. Once fancies mature, the result is that a man becomes a disbeliever in the *ṭarīqa*. In the world I ambush them at the beginning of the road of disbelief so that they will return to their own measure.” of everything not related to faith with the sword of jealousy. Once fancies mature, the result is that a man becomes a disbeliever in the *ṭarīqa*. In the world I ambush them at the beginning of the road of disbelief so that they will return to their own measure.”

As for the wall that he repaired, that is an allusion to the serene soul. When he saw that it had become pure and cleansed in the crucible of struggle and was about to become nothing, he said, “O Moses, do not let it become nothing, for it is the rightful due of that Threshold to receive its service. Repairing its outwardness and taking into consideration its inwardness is obligatory for everyone. ‘Surely your soul has a rightful due against you.’ Beneath it has been placed the treasures of the secrets of Eternity. If this wall of the soul is laid low, the lordly secrets will fall onto the plain, and every worthless nobody will crave to have them.”

The secret in these words is that the treasure of the *ḥaqīqah* has been placed in the attributes of mortal nature, and the stages of the clay of the poor were made its curtain. This is exactly what that chevalier said: “Seek the religion from the poor, for reigning kings have the custom of keeping treasures in ruined places.”.

It has also been said that when Khidr said about the ship, “I desired to damage it” (18:79), he was reporting that he alone desired that; he said, “I desired to damage it,” observing courtesy by ascribing to himself the desire for damage. When he reached the talk of the slain boy, he said, “We desired” (18:81), because within it was killing, and killing is something earned by the created thing, whereas creation is God’s bounty. When he reached the talk of

the two orphans, he said, “So thy Lord desired that they should reach their maturity” (18:82), for there was none of his own acquisition in that.

Ibn ‘Aṭā’ said, “When Khidr said, ‘I desired,’ it was revealed to him in his secret core, ‘Who are you that you should have desire?’ So the second time he said, ‘We desired,’ and it was revealed to him in his secret core, ‘Who are you and Moses that you two should have desires?’ So he returned and said, ‘Your Lord desired.’”

- 3) al-Kāshānī (d. 1329), ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kamāl al-Dīn b. Abi’l-Ghanāim al-Kāshānī. (n.d.). *Tafsīr al-Kāshānī*, Great commentaries on the holy Qur’ān. Amman, Jordan press. Royal Aal al-bayt Institute for Islamic thought. Part I Surahs 1-18. Translation by Feras Hamza who is assistant professor of Middle Eastern studies at the American university in Dubai.

al-Kashan’s interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr 18:62-82:

(Q18:60) And when Moses said to his lad: the exoteric aspect of this is what is related in the stories of the prophets (*qiṣas*) and there is no way of denying the miracles. As for its esoteric aspect, that is to say the following: and when Moses-the-Heart, said to his lad-the-Soul at the moment of its attachment to the body, ‘I will not give up, that is, I will not cease to march and journey, or, I will continue to march, until I have reached the juncture of the two seas, the meeting-point of the two worlds, the world of the spirit and the world of the body, which constitute the sweet and the salty within the form of mankind and at the station of the heart, though I march on for ages’, that is, [though] I march for a long time.

(Q18:61) So when they reached a juncture between the two, in the all-comprehensive present form, they forgot their fish, which is the fish that swallowed Dhū’l-Nūn, may peace be upon him, as a type and not as that individual [fish], because their breakfast was before their arrival at this form externally from that fish which he had been commanded to take as a provision for the journey at the moment of resolve; and so it made its way, into the sea of the body alive as it had been at the first instance, by burrowing, a wide tunnel, as is related. Its [tunnelled] path to the sea remained open and was not covered over by the [waters of the] sea.

(Q18:62) And when they had made the traverse, the place of the separation from the fish and fatigue and hunger befell Moses, whereas he had not become fatigued during his journeying and had not become hungry before that, according to what has been narrated, he remembered the fish and the nourishment it could provide and so he asked his lad [to bring them] the breakfast. He said, ‘Bring us our breakfast, because his [spiritual] state then was that of the daytime in relation to what comes before in the womb. We have certainly encountered on this journey of ours much fatigue’, which is the fatigue and hardship of being born.

(Q18:63) He said, ‘Do you see? what is it that has left me nude [as a child], when we sheltered at the rock, at the chest to suckle; indeed, I forgot the fish, when we had no need

for it — and none but Satan made me forget to mention it, that is to say, it was Satan that made me forget to remember it, substituting an *adhkurahu* for the [suffixed] pronoun [*hu in ansānī-hu*]. Moses had been asleep when the fish made its way into the sea in the way related, while the lad-the-Soul had been awake, and so Satan-the-Estimation, the one who had adorned the tree for Adam (Q2:35-6), made Moses forget to remember the soul-the-Fish, since the state was one of distraction (*dhuhūl*).

The ‘way’ that caused amazement was the aforementioned burrowing [made by the fish].

(Q18:64) Said he, ‘That, in other words, that escape of the fish and its making its way in accordance with its innate disposition (*jibilla*), is what we have been, seeking. Because there can be found the juncture of the two seas where Moses had been promised that he would find someone more knowledgeable than him. For the ascent to perfection by close pursuit of the holy intellect can only be at such a station. So they turned back, retracing their footsteps, in rising to the station of the first primordial nature (*fiṭra ūlā*) as they had initially been retracing their footsteps at the descent from the ascent to perfection until they found the holy intellect which is one of God’s servants singled out for the privilege of [divine] solicitude and mercy.

(Q18:65) “So [there] they found one of Our servants” to whom We had given mercy from Us, that is, spiritual perfection through disengagement from matter and sanctification from direction as well as pure luminosity all of which are the effects of propinquity and with-ness, and We had taught him knowledge from Us, in the way of holy gnosés and God-given universal realities without the medium of human instruction.

(Q18:66) As for his words, ‘May I follow you, this is the manifestation of the [spiritual] desire for wayfaring and the ascent to perfection.

(Q18:67) ‘Truly you will not be able to bear with me, since you are not privy to matters of the Unseen or spiritual realities as you have not disengaged, but are veiled by the body and its coverings and so you will not be able to bear my company; and that is the signification of his words:

(Q18:68) “How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?”.

(Q18:69) Moses said, ‘God willing, you will find me patient, because of the power of my preparedness and my steadfastness in staying the path, and I will not disobey you in any

matter’, on account of my orientation towards you and my acceptance of your command because of my purity and the sincerity of my [spiritual] desire. All of [these] negotiations are taking place by the tongue of the state.

(Q18:70) ‘If you follow me, in the wayfaring along the path of perfection, then do not question me concerning anything, in other words, you must follow [my] lead and persevere along the journey with works, acts of self-discipline, [noble] character traits and exertions, and not demand realities or significations, until, the moment for that comes along and then, I [myself] make mention of it, that is, of that knowledge, to you’, and inform you about the Unseen realities upon your disengagement through interactions belonging to the mould and to the heart.

(Q18:71) So they set off until when they embarked, on the ship of the body that has reached the limit of self-discipline, when it is good for servanthood, [travelling] to the world of holiness across the sea of primordial matter as it journeys to God, he made a hole in it, that is, he diminished it by means of [spiritual] discipline, by decreasing [his intake of] food, weakening its workings, upsetting its regulation and enervating it. Said [Moses], ‘Did you make a hole in it to drown its people?, that is, did you break it in order to drown in the sea of primordial matter the animal and vegetative faculties that are in it so that it might be perish? You have certainly done a dreadful thing’: this denunciation is an expression of the manifestation of the soul with its attributes and the inclining of the heart to it and the dissatisfaction with being deprived of its shares during the act of [spiritual] disciplining and its lack of contentment with its duties.

(Q18:72) He said, ‘‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’’: a spiritual warning and a holy incitement to the effect that resolve during the wayfaring should be stronger than that.

(Q18:73) He said, ‘Do not take me to task on account of that which I forgot, to the end [of the verse]: an apology at the station of the self-reproaching soul.

(Q18:74) So they set off until, when they met a boy: this is the soul, which manifests itself with its attributes and thus veils the heart accordingly becomes an evil-commanding soul. The slaying of him is the extinguishing of anger, passionate desire and all of the [other] attributes. ‘Have you slain an innocent soul: an objection [arising] from the heart’s affection for the soul.

(Q18:75) And [the statement]: ‘Did I not say to you, is a reminder and a spiritual expression.

(Q18:76) And [the statement]: ‘If I ask you about anything, to the end [of the verse] is an apology and an affirmation of guilt and an admission, all of which constitute variegations at the engendering of the self-reproaching soul.

(18:77) So they set off, until, when they came to the folk of a [certain] town, [folk] being the corporeal faculties. Their asking of them for food is a demand for spiritual nourishment from them, that is, by means of them, as when universal significations are extracted from the particular perceptibles of these. They refused to extend them hospitality, even though they had given them nourishment before that, because their nourishment at that point came from above them from the holy lights and from the self-disclosures of the Beauty and the Majesty and [from] the divine gnosés and the significations belonging to the Unseen, and not from below their feet as had been the case before the holing of the ship and the slaying of the boy by means of spiritual discipline, when the faculties and the senses prevented that and were not facilitating it.

Nay, these only become configured after they have become somnolent and quiet, as when Moses said to his family, ‘Wait [here]’ (Q 20:10). As for the wall which was: about to collapse, this is the reassured soul. It is referred to by the [expression] ‘wall’ because it originated after the slaying of the evil-commanding soul and [after] its [the latter’s] death by means of spiritual disciplining, and so it became like a thing that is inanimate, unable to move by itself and by its own desire and because of the extent of its feebleness it nearly perished. Thus its state was depicted as one ‘desiring to collapse’. As for his straightening of it, that is the setting of it in order by means of the perfections of character traits and the beautiful qualities of excellence by the light of the rational speech faculty until the qualities of excellence came to replace its attributes of vice. As for Moses’ words, Had you wished, you could have taken a wage for it, is a variegation of the heart, not of the soul, which is the demand for wage and reward by the acquisition of qualities of excellence and by the use of acts of spiritual discipline, which is why the other responded to him with the words:

(Q18:78) This is where you and I part company: in other words, this is the separate reality of my station and yours and the difference between them and the separation between my state and yours. For the cultivation of the soul through spiritual discipline and the assumption of praiseworthy character traits are not intended in anticipation of reward or wage. Otherwise, these would not be qualities of excellence or perfections, since a meritorious quality is to

assume the character traits of the divine such that the acts that issue from that person are intended for their own sake and not for some other purpose. What is [done] for some other purpose is [in reality] a veil, a vice and not a quality of excellence. What one ought to do is to throw off the veil and to remove of the cover of the soul's attributes and to become projected into the world of light in order to receive the significations of the Unseen, nay to become qualified by the divine attributes, nay to be realised in God after being annihilated in Him, and not for the sake of reward, as you [Moses] claim. I will inform you the interpretation of that which you were not able to endure with patience: in other words, when the soul is reassured and the faculties have become stable, you will be able to accept [Unseen] significations and to receive the Unseen which I had forbidden you to inquire about 'until I had made mention to it of you'. Now I shall make mention [of things] to you and I shall inform you of the interpretation of these matters if you are prepared for the reception of meanings and gnoses:

(Q18:79) As for the ship, it belonged to poor people, in the sea of primordial matter, that is [it belonged to] the corporeal faculties such as the external sensoria and the natural vegetative faculties. He referred to these [faculties] as *masākīn* ('poor') because of their constant stillness (*sukūn*) and their adhering to the dust of the body and their ineffectualness in contravening the heart during wayfaring and conquering it, as with all of the animal faculties. It is related that these [poor] were ten brothers, five of whom were chronically ill with the other five working at sea, which is itself an allusion to the [five] external sensoria and the internal ones; and I wanted to make it defective, by means of spiritual disciplining lest the-king-the-evil-commanding-soul should seize it by force. This was the king who was behind them, that is, in front of them, seizing every ship by force, by taking possession of it and using it for his own vain desires and pursuits.

(Q18:80) And as for the boy, his parents, who were the spirit and physical nature, were believers, affirmers of the Oneness by virtue of their yielding as they wayfare in obedience of God, submit to God's command and comply with what God desires from them; and We feared lest he should overwhelm them, totally cover them, with insolence, towards them by manifesting himself in his I-ness at the presential vision of the spirit, and ingratitude, towards the grace of having them by his disobedience and evil action; or with ingratitude for the veil so that he ends up spoiling for them their affair and their religion and invalidating [for them] their servanthood of God.

(Q18:81) So We desired that their Lord should give them in exchange one better than him in purity, as He did by giving them in [his] place the reassured soul which is better than him in purity and unblemishedness, and closer to mercy, to being loving and merciful since it [the reassured soul] is more affectionate towards the soul and the body and more beneficial to both and more compassionate towards them. It is possible that by ‘parents’ is meant that the grandfather and the father, and so they figuratively stand for the spirit and the heart, in which case his [the boy’s] being ‘closer to mercy’, means that he is more suitable for them and more intensely affectionate [to them].

(Q18:82) And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys [who lived] in the city: that is, the twin rational faculty of the considerative and the practical that are severed from their parent, who is the holy spirit, because they have veiled themselves from him by means of corporeal coverings, or [he is] the heart that has died or was slain before perfection by the soul’s conquest of the city-the-body. And beneath it there was a treasure belonging to them, that is, the treasure of gnosis which is only actualised through these two [faculties] at the station of the heart on account of the fact that all of the universals and the particulars are able to come together in it [the heart] in actuality at the moment of perfection, which is the state of coming of age and the extraction of that treasure. Some exoteric commentators relate that the treasure was scrolls in which there was [certain] knowledge. Their father had been — [this is valid] in the case of both interpretations — a righteous man: it is also said that he was a father from ‘above’ to them and God preserved them for him, in which case, he can only be the holy spirit.

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