

## Lessons from the Story of Moses and Khidr

### (part 1 of 2): Who is Khidr?



Elsewhere on this website you are able to read about the life of Prophet Moses, may God praise him. It is a fascinating story filled with anecdotes and life lessons that are applicable today as they were in the time of Moses. Briefly, in the final part of that series, the story of Moses and Khidr is retold, based on the original story told by Ibn Kathir in his work, *The Stories of the Prophets* and what the Quran tells us about this momentous meeting.<sup>[1]</sup> In this two part article we will look at the lessons learned specifically from the relationship between Moses and Khidr. We will find that their interactions form the basis of lessons that still, all these generations later, teach us how to deal with problems that confront us every day. Before we look at how the paths of these two wise men crossed we will try to discover who the man we call Khidr was.

It was during the years that Moses and the Children of Israel wandered the desert, unable to enter the Promised Land; Moses met and spent time with Khidr. The name Khidr is taken to mean “the green one” colloquially associated with the Arabic word for green, *al-akhdar*. In his traditions Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him, relates that, *“He was named Khidr because he sat on a dry, barren piece of land and it suddenly became green under him.”*<sup>[2]</sup>

The majority of Islamic scholars are of the opinion that Khidr was a Prophet. The Quran refers to him as one of God’s servants who was granted knowledge, comprehension and mercy.

**“Then they found one from among Our servants to whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Ourselves.” (Quran 18: 65)**

It is from the traditions of Prophet Muhammad that we learn that the wise, knowledgeable man who instructs Moses is in fact Khidr. As Muslims we believe that God has only informed us of the names of some of the Prophets.

We believe that all nations throughout time were sent someone to warn them of the punishment that awaited those who disobeyed God, and to guide them to the correct way to worship. Therefore it is certainly within the realms of possibility and perfectly acceptable to have the opinion that Khidr was one of the Prophets.

The name Khidr or the “green one” has been connected with knowledgeable and mystical figures throughout different time periods and in varied religions. He is invariably associated with wisdom and imparting knowledge. Modern historians hypothesize that Khidr is in fact Kothar wa Khasis, a figure first noted in Ugaritic (Northern Syrian) literature and mythology. Kothar is a wise man, associated with among other things, dragon slaying; which may account for myths associating Khidr with St George the dragon slayer of Christian mythology.

Other Christian scholars suggest that Khidr is the Green Knight from the Arthurian tale Sir Gwain and the Green Knight, thus the character may have come into European/Christian literature via the intermingling of cultures during the tumultuous period of the Crusades. Still other scholars propose that the legend and story of Khidr derive from an Irish myth that predates the Crusades featuring Cu Chulain.

There are similar stories in Jewish literature that associate the character of Khidr with Prophet Elijah and myths and stories abound across the Indian sub-continent that associate Khidr with a river spirit. Faced with all these various myths, legends and stories about Khidr just what should a believing person trust or believe in? First of all it is worth bearing in mind that all we need to know about the religion of Islam and our purpose in life is contained in the Quran and the authentic teachings of Prophet Muhammad. There are many things that are not revealed to us and thus we should assume that knowing them can in no way benefit or improve our worship of God.

In any case, it is important to revisit the story of Khidr and Moses in the Quran. Ibn Kathir narrates that Moses was once asked by someone, “O Messenger of God, is there another man on earth more learned than you?” Moses replied, “No!” believing that since God had allowed him to perform miracles and had given him the Torah, he must surely be the most learned man alive. This however was not the case thus when Moses learned of Khidr’s existence he set out to find him.

God instructed Moses to take a live fish in a container and that when the fish disappeared he would find the man he sought. Moses set out on his journey, accompanied by a young man who carried the container with the fish. Eventually they did meet Khidr in just the way God had assured Moses they would. Full details of this journey can be found [here](#)<sup>[3]</sup>. Before moving on to article two where we discuss the lessons to be learned from Moses’ and Khidr’s encounter it would be both wise and beneficial to read the story from the Quran. You will find this at Quran 18:66-82 beginning with Moses acknowledging that there is much he can learn from Khidr and Khidr pointing

out that Moses will not have the patience to find the meaning behind Khidr's actions.

**“Moses said to him, “May I follow you on [the condition] that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgment?” He said, “Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience. And how can you have patience for what you do not encompass in knowledge?” Moses said, “You will find me, if Allah wills, patient, and I will not disobey you in any order.”(Quran 18:66-70)**

---

#### Footnotes:

[1] <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/3467/>

[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, At Tirmidhi*

[3] <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/3467/>.

## (part 2 of 2): A Journey of Lessons

Muslims both love and respect Moses; God mentions him in the Quran more than 120 times. His story is told across several chapters one of them being chapter 18 -The Cave. It is here that the story of meeting between Prophet Moses and the wise, knowledgeable man known as Khidr can be found.

This story serves to remind us that God is the Most Wise. God brings together two of history's most wise men and teaches us that God's decree stems from His supreme and absolute wisdom. The life of a human being is sometimes beset by trials, tragedies or calamities that appear to make no sense but in retrospect we see them for what they really are, lessons from the Most Wise designed to take us closer to the supreme reward, Al-Jannah, or Paradise.

Contentment with God's decree, whether we initially feel it to be pleasant or unpleasant is the most important lesson we can take away from the story of Moses and Khidr. Belief in the divine decree is one of the six pillars of the Islamic faith. Therefore, not only accepting but also understanding what this entails is important. The problems that we face in life can be a source of good for us.

Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him, said: “How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for his affairs are all good, and this applies to no one but the believer. If something good happens to him, he is thankful for it and that is good for him. If something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience and that is good for him.”<sup>[1]</sup>

At this point, if you are not already familiar with the story of Moses and Khidr as told in the Quran it would be of great benefit to read it for yourself and have it fresh in your mind as we follow Moses on his journey. Moses quest is to seek the man with more knowledge than he himself has. He sets out with a boy, possibly Joshua, the pious man who leads the Children of Israel after Moses' death. God had instructed them to carry a live fish in a container, and said that where the fish disappeared they would find the man they were seeking. So the story begins and throughout the story God imparts His wisdom and knowledge to us.

While Moses was taking a nap his companion saw the fish wriggle away and slip into the water, however he forgot to inform Prophet Moses until much later when they had already moved further on up the road. When Prophet Moses realized he had moved beyond the destined point, he hastily retraced his steps to the place where the fish had entered the water. He did not scold his companion nor lament about having gone off course, or wasting time and effort. What had happened had happened; it was the will of God. Prophet Moses' behaviour is that of a person satisfied with God's decree. Once he learned that he had stepped away from the correct path he took the necessary action to return to the right way. This is a lesson for all of us. In this life, so many of us choose the wrong path but are afraid or too embarrassed to rectify their mistakes! Once a person realizes that he has committed a mistake, they should immediately set about to head in the right direction. This should never be considered a defeat; rather, it is a victory.

Upon returning to the place where the fish escaped Moses found the man he had been searching for, Khidr. God chose to educate Prophet Moses through three events that would take place during the journey of Moses with Khidr. Khidr was hesitant to travel with Moses because he believed Moses would not have the patience to see the events through and learn from them. However Moses was able to convince Khidr that he was anxious to learn and they set off together.

Prophet Muhammad constantly stressed the importance of knowledge. He tells us in his traditions that the angels pray for the scholars, that God assists the person seeking knowledge, and that the scholars are the heirs of the Prophets.

In the first event Khidr and Moses board a ship, whereupon Khidr bores a hole in the ship making it defective and unable to sail. Moses is horrified and labels his actions as evil. Khidr then reminds Moses that he had agreed to have patience and not ask questions. Moses reaffirmed his promise and they continued on, Quran tells us that when they passed by a young boy Khidr killed him. Moses was horrified, and forgot his promise. Khidr reminded him once again and they continued on. At last they came to a town and asked the people to feed them for they were hungry after the long journey. The people refused and instead of confronting the people or leaving the town Khidr rebuilt a wall that was collapsing. Moses could not understand why he didn't ask for

payment. Khidr then informed Moses that this was the end of their journey together but he would explain the reasons why he acted the way he did in all three situations.

Khidr had caused minor damage to the ship to protect it from greater harm. There was a King coming behind them seizing all sea worthy vessels. Instead of losing their boat, livelihood and possibly their lives the fishermen now had only to repair the damage. As for taking the young boys life, he was destined to grow up and over burden his parents with his sins and actions of disbelief, therefore God intended to replace him with a pious good child. In the final event Khidr rebuilt the wall even though the town's people were unfriendly because God had instructed him to do so. Beneath the wall lay a treasure that belonged to two orphan boys. God wanted it to remain hidden until they were grown men and could take their treasure without fear of harassment or thievery for their father was a righteous man.

Khidr acted the way he did in all three situations in obedience to God's commands, he did not choose to do these things because of his personal judgement and nor did he have absolute knowledge of the unseen. It is important to understand that God does not create evil for its own sake, but rather it is often the forerunner of good. These three events illustrate this point. When we understand this we will never feel victimised or treated unfairly. Sometimes the good in a difficult situation does not become clear until a long time afterwards, at other times it is apparent immediately. The story of Moses and Khidr tells us to be patient and trust in the mercy and wisdom of God. It tells us that God does not treat anyone unfairly and that His decree for us is most just and inherently generous.

---

#### **Footnotes:**

[\[1\]](#) *Saheeh Muslim*