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UNVEILING THE QUR'ANIC HIDDEN MATTERS BETWEEN PROPHET MUSA AND AL-KHIDR: LESSONS FOR MUSLIM TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: The Glorious Qur'an is meant to guide the entire aspects of human life. This is true considering the fact that many chapters in the Qur'an gave some information of the past nations as to how they were rewarded or punished for others to emulate them in all good deeds and refrain from the evils they have committed. In the Qur'an, there is a fascinating narrative mentioned in Chapter 18 which discusses the encounter between Prophet Musa and Al-Khidr. Their journey together involves perplexing actions by Khidr, which Prophet Musa struggles to understand. However, Musa reveals the hidden matters showcasing the limitations of human knowledge. It is in line with this submission that this paper intends to discuss the unveiling hidden matters between Prophet Musa and AL-Khidr expounded in the Qur'an as a lesson to Muslim teachers and students. To achieve the objectives of the research, the paper attempts to answer some questions in order to unravel the hidden matters mentioned in the narrative found in Surah 18 of the Glorious Qur'an. The paper adopts analytical methodology.

Keywords: Hidden Matters, Prophets Musa, Khidr, Qur'an, Lesson, Teachers, Students

INTRODUCTION

The narrative of Prophet Musa and Khidr in the Qur'an, found in chapter 18, reveals hidden matters and profound lessons that captivate the reader's imagination. This narrative of an encounter between the duo, each bestowed with unique knowledge and wisdom unveils deeper truth and mysteries. The Qur'anic narrative introduces Prophet Musa, a revered and righteous figure who yearns to meet AL-Khidr possessing superior knowledge. In response to his quest, Almighty Allah informs Prophet Musa about His servant who possesses exceptional insights, granted directly by Him. Ignited by curiosity and desire to gain more and more wisdom, Musa embarks on a journey seeking this remarkable individual. The significance of this narrative therefore extends beyond its historical context, as it holds timeless lessons that resonate with individuals from various background. It thus highlights the importance of patience, humility, trust in the divine plan and realization that hidden matters exist beyond human comprehension. Above all, examining the details and contemplating the lessons imparted, Muslims can unlock valuable insights that resonate with personal and spiritual journeys.

Prophets Musa and Al-Khidr (AS)

This is one of the major subjects discussed in Surah al-Kahf explaining the contact between the two. However, it is pertinent to discuss the opinions of scholars as to who Al-Khidr is, how he met with Prophet Musa (AS) and the genesis of their meeting.

Al-Khidr as a Prophet

There is a debate whether Al-Khidr is a Prophet or not. Although evidences proving his Prophethood exist, various Muslim scholars of varying degree of Qur'anic knowledge such as Al-Sa'adi, opined that Al-Khidr is not a Prophet but a saint, arguing that the statement "and I did them not of my own accord' expressed in the Qur'an only evinces that he was inspired by Allah, the type of inspiration received by Prophet Musa's mother and Bee. As'ad¹ also maintained that Al-Khidr is just a righteous person but not a Prophet. However, Al-Zaid² in his <u>Tafsir</u> supported the above view point which he said is held by numerous scholars.

In spite of the views advanced by these scholars, it can be observed that it is stronger, the view that Al-Khidr is a Prophet of Allah. This is because it is mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an that Al-Khidr did not do any thing out of his own desire but as ordered by Allah, the Almighty.

Equally, Ibn Kathir, in his Tafsir³, accepted the opinion that Al-Khidr is a Prophet of Allah. Al-Zamakhshari⁴ also concurred with Ibn Kathir and stressed that the statement of Allah:

So they found one of Our servants on whom We had bestowed Mercy from Ourselves and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own presence⁵

Clearly confirmed that Al-Khidr was a recipient of revelation and was given Prophethood as well. Similarly, Adam⁶ acknowledged Al-Khidr as a Prophet quoting relevant verses of the Glorious Qur'an to support his point.

Al-Jaza'iri⁷, maintained same opinion saying that all that happened between Musa and Al-Khidr (AS) came through divine revelation. He disagreed with those who posited that the type of knowledge Al-Khidr had is the type which was given to Saints and therefore, he is only a Saint. Al-Jaza'iri on his part debunked this claim and rendered it baseless.

¹ Abd Allah bin Ahmad Al-Zaid, <u>Mukhtasar al-Tafsir al-Baghwi,</u> Vol.5, 1st ed, Dar al-Salam, 1416 AH, P. 21.

² Al-Hafiz Isma'il ibn Kathir, Tafsir Ibn Kathir, P. 33

³ Abul Qasim Mahmud bin Amr bin Ahmad al-Zamakhshari, <u>Al-Kashshaf</u>, Mauqi'ut-Tafasir, Vol.4, P.33 retrieved in Maktabat al-Shamelah Software.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Qur'an 18:65

⁶ Ja'afar Mahmud Adam, 'Ramadan Tafsir in audio cassette' 1418/1998 in Maiduguri, Borno State.

⁷ Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri, Aisar al-Tafasir, Vol.2, P. 396 retrieved through Maktabat al-Shamelah Software.

Al-Turkiy⁸ is of the view that Al- Khidr is a Prophet among the Prophets of Allah for he was bestowed mercy from Allah who taught him the hidden realities. Al-Razi⁹ also accepted the view that Al-Khidr is a Prophet because according to him Almighty Allah says that 'He had bestowed mercy on Al-Khidr from Him' and that the mercy here represents Prophethood as can be seen in this verse:

Is it they who would portion out the Mercy of thy Lord? It is We Who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world: and We raise some of them above others in ranks so that some may command work from others. But the Mercy of thy Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass¹⁰

It can be fathomed that, the word mercy in the verse quoted above stands for Prophethood which, in turn, proves that Al-Khidr is a Prophet of Allah. Similarly, Allah, the Exalted says:

So they found one of Our servants on whom We had bestowed Mercy from Ourselves and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own presence¹¹

And Musa requested saying as explained in the Qur'an:

May I follow you so that you teach me something of that knowledge which you have been taught (by Allah)?¹²

In fact, it can be described from the above verses that a Prophet never follows one who is lower than him in position i.e. not a Prophet, particularly, in search of knowledge. This is no doubt a clear evidence that indicates that Al-Khidr is a Prophet of Allah. This view has also been corroborated by the statement of Al-Khidr himself, in the midst of the story, when he remarked that, "I was only commanded to do these things that were enjoined upon me". 13

Al-Qurtubi,¹⁴ in his <u>Tafsir</u>, shared the same opinion with Abu Ishaq al-Tha'labi in establishing the fact that Al-Khidr is a Prophet from Allah who had been bestowed with knowledge and mercy representing inspiration and Prophethood. On the basis of numerous evidences highlited above, it could be concluded that Al-Khidr is a Prophet of Allah, the Most-High.

The Meeting of Musa and Al-Khidr (AS)

⁸ Abd Allah bin Abd Al-Muhsin al-Turkiy, Al-Tafsir al-Muyassir, Vol.5, P. 165, sourced in Maktabat al-Shamelah Software.

⁹ Abu Abd Allah Muhammad bin 'Umar Al-Razi, <u>Mafatih al-Ghayb</u>, Vol.10, P.230 retrieved in <u>Maktabat al-Shamelah Software.</u>

¹⁰ Qur'an 43:32

¹¹ *Our'an 28:86*

¹² Qur'an 18:66

¹³ Qur'an 18:82

¹⁴ Abu Abd Allah Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Abi Bakr Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir al-Qurtubi, Mauqi' Ya'sub, Vol. 11, P.43 used in Maktabat al-Shamelah Software.

Record has it that one of the most historical events in the life of Prophet Musa (AS) was his meeting with Al-Khidr. The meeting and the event that followed was given in detailed form in Surah al-Kahf and in the Hadith narrated by Ubay b. Ka'ab (RA). It is important to fathom that however learned one is, one cannot claim the knowledge of every thing. This is true with Prophet Musa because the divine knowledge is unlimited compared to that of men. The reason why Musa (AS) was commanded by Allah to go and meet one of His servants, Al-Khidr to acquire knowledge and wisdom was reported in the following long Hadith:

Musa got up to deliver a speech before the Children of Israel and he was asked, "Who is the most learned person among the people" He replied, "I am." Allah rebuked him because he did not refer the knowledge to Allah. So Allah revealed to him: "At the junction of the two seas there is a servant of Ours who is more learned than you." Musa asked, "O my Lord, how can I meet him" Allah said, "Take a fish and put it in a vessel and then set out, and where you lose the fish, you will find him." So Musa took a fish, put it in a vessel and set out, along with his boy-servant Yusha' bin Nun, till they reached a rock (on which) they both laid down their heads and slept. The fish moved vigorously in the vessel and got out of it and fell into the sea and there it took its way through the sea (straight) as in a tunnel. Allah stopped the flow of water on both sides of the way created by the fish, and so that way was like a tunnel. When Musa got up, his companion forgot to tell him about the fish, and so they carried on their journey during the rest of the day and the whole night. The next morning Musa said to his boy-servant, "Bring us our morning meal; truly, we have suffered much fatigue in this, our journey....¹⁵

One would notice from the above Hadith that Prophet Musa has not, in any way, arrogated total and complete knowledge¹⁶ to himself, but, as far as the time, location and his people are concerned, he proved himself to be the most knowledgeable of them all.

Search for al-Khidr:

After Allah has commanded Musa to go and meet Al-Khidr he therefore undertook the journey until he passed the point¹⁷ where Almighty Allah had ordered him to look for the later. So, his page¹⁸ said to him as explained in the Glorious Qur'an:

You know! I forgot to tell you about the fish, which made its way miraculously into the river, when we were resting

¹⁵ Al-Imam al-Hafiz Abi Abd Allah Muhammad bin Isma'il al-Bukhari, Sahih Bukhari, Maktabat al-Misriyyah, 2004, Vol. 11 Hadith No 3149, P.202 and Vol 14, Hadith No. 4356 sourced in Maktabat al-Shamelah Software

¹⁶ Ja'far Mahmud Adam, 'Tafsir Surah al-Kahf' in audio Cassette, 2004

¹⁷ Meaning the rock at the junction they forgot their fish which became alive and took its way out of the basket and then into the sea. For detail see Our'an 18:62

¹⁸ Yusha' bin Nun who is Musa's student and his servant. Refer to Abul Qasim Mahmud al-Zamakhshari, **Al-Kashshaf,** Mauqi' ut-Tafasir, Vol. 4. P.33 available in <u>Maktabat al-Shamelah software.</u>

beside that rock. It was Shaitan who made me forget to mention this incident to you.¹⁹

Attributing forgetfulness to Shaytan may be connected with the fact that he (Shaytan) had not wished the journey to become a reality since it has to do with the meeting of a scholar and a Prophet, Al-Khidr,²⁰ and will pave ways for an increase in the existing knowledge. So, they returned tracing their footsteps till they got to the spot. There they found a certain man covered with a garment and greeted each other. Al-Khidr enquired "Are you Musa of the children of Israel"? Musa replied yes and then added 'I have come to you so that you may teach me something of that knowledge which you have been granted by Allah.²¹

Deduced from here is that Prophet Musa made a very simple request before Al-Khidr, for he wanted to learn something of the special knowledge which Almighty Allah had bestowed on Al-Khidr. Al-Khidr said to Musa 'You will not be able to remain patient with me^{22} for I was given certain knowledge which has not been bestowed upon you and you have some knowledge which has not been granted to me'. Musa harped that Allah willing, he would be found patient and will not disobey al-Khidr in aught. It is interesting to know that this is a dialogue between two great personalities on the issue of knowledge. Furthermore, Prophet Musa (AS) used the word "follow" not "accompany", the notion which signifies teacher-student relation ship.

Equally important is the fact that throughout the pages of the Qur'an the word Al-Khidr has not been mentioned but tradition gives it as Khidr, meaning 'green' and which also signifies that his knowledge is fresh and green for he has secrets of some of the paradoxes of life, which ordinary people did not understand or that it is understood in a wrong way.²⁵

Additionally, Al-Khidr was granted two special gifts from Allah; mercy and knowledge. The first freed him from incidents of daily life and the second entitled him to interpret the inner meaning and mystery of events. Indeed, Prophet Musa (AS) is a natural true learner at heart for he had the merits of having profound patience, humility and sincerity of soul, and above all, the desire to acquire beneficial knowledge. Having said this, what follows in the next segment is a reflection of three journeys undertook by Prophets Musa and Al-Khidr for the purpose of search of knowledge.

The Contact Between Prophets Musa and Al-Khidr:

¹⁹ Qur'an 18:63

²⁰ According to Abul Qasim Mahmud, the author of <u>Al-Kashshaf</u>, Al-Khidr, was a Prophet for he was favoured with both al-Wahy and al-Nubuwwat. See also Qur'an 18:65

²¹ Qur'an 18:66

²² Our'an 18:67

²³ Imam Abu al-Fida' Isma'il bin 'Umar bin Kathir, Op. Cit, P. 33

²⁴ Our'an 18:69

²⁵ Yusuf Ali, Meaning and Commentary of the Glorious Qur'an, footnote 2411 Chapter 18:65

²⁶ Ibid, footnote 2412 Chapter 18:65

Almighty Allah in His infinite mercy chose to educate Prophet Musa through al-Khidr in three incidents which outwardly sounded very negative²⁷ but inwardly very imperative for mankind today and tomorrow. Before they embarked on the first journey the duo had an agreement and the term of reference of the agreement was that Prophet Musa was to follow al-Khidr provided that the former does not ask about anything until the later explains it to him. This means that he should not initiate discussion on any matter unless he is asked to. Though the teacher is doubtful, he however accepted and permitted him to follow him on certain conditions.²⁸

However, Prophet Musa adopted the true attitude of learner to the teacher and then promised to obey in all things, with the help of Allah. Both set out walking along the seashore until when a boat passed by them and they requested the crew of the boat to take them and their faces were instantly recognized as Prophets²⁹ by the crew, and the recognition made them not to pay any fare, as an honor to Al-Khidr. It was at this moment that a sparrow came and stood on the edge of the boat and dipped its beak once or twice in the sea. Al-Khidr said: "O Musa! My knowledge and your knowledge have not decreased Allah's knowledge except as much as this sparrow has decreased the water of the sea with its beak.³⁰ Al-Khidr used illustrative and convincing method to convey his message and make his point cogently clearer to Prophet Musa (AS).

Moreover, after making sure that none of the crew or passengers has seen him except Musa, Al-Khidr punctured a hole in the bottom of the boat and without explaining it to his student, Musa. At this moment, Musa asked 'Have you pierced it so as to drown those in it?' Prophet Musa asked this question for he could not restrain himself seeing strange things which he has not been accustomed to. Al-Khidr replied thus, 'Did I not tell you, that you would not be able to have patience with me?³¹ Patiently, Prophet Musa (AS) pleaded not to account for what he has forgotten. They proceeded a little further and found a boy playing with other boys and Al-Khidr stopped and gazed at a boy in particular, took hold of the boy's head and killed him. Musa, for the second time questioned Al-Khidr thus: 'Have you killed an innocent soul who has killed none? Al-Khidr answered,' Did I not tell you that you cannot remain patient with me?

This statement further evinces that Al-Khidr was now reminding Musa the promise he had made in the first place. Prophet Musa (AS), told Al-Khidr that if he objects anything from Al-Khidr's action again he should not keep him in his company, because his apology has been accepted twice. The duo proceeded until they came to the people of a town, when they are both hungry and asked them for a food but they were denied all hospitability. After the denial they saw a wall at a point of collapsing and Al-Khidr erected it with his hands and without demanding any remuneration. Prophet Musa who grew impatient with al-Khidr on this matter remonstrated with him, as he could not comprehend al-Khidr's act.

 $^{^{27}}$ Amr Khalid, Qur'anic reflections insights into the objectives of the Qur'anic verses, Part 2/3, Dar al-Tarjamah, P. 65

²⁸ Yusuf Ali, Op. Cit, footnote 2416 under Chapter 18:69

²⁹ Abul Qasim Mahmud al Zamakhshari, Op. Cit, P.38. Vol. 4

³⁰ Al-Hafiz Isma'il ibn Kathir, Op. Cit, P. 32

³¹ Qur'an 18:72

He therefore made the third comment saying: 'If you had wished, surely you could have taken wages for it'. Al-Khidr therefore told him that it was time to part with him. He reminded Musa that he made mentioned that, after the boy was killed, that if he asked him anything after that, he would not accompany him any further.

The Hidden Matters

The explanation of the hidden matters in the three journeys undertaken by Prophets Musa and Al-Khidr was presented in a special pattern.

First Journey: Regarding the first journey, Al-Khidr expounded to Musa that the ship belonged to some men who were in dire need and who use it a s means of their livelihood. Almighty Allah elucidates in the following Qur'anic verse:

> As for the boat it belonged to certain men in dire want: they plied on the water: I but wished to render it unserviceable for there was after them a certain king who seized on every boat by force.³²

According to Ali³³ a famous commentator of the Qur'an, if this boat had been taken away from these self-respecting men, who were about ten, 34 they would have been reduced to beggary, with no resources left to them. And this, simply, alluded that the minor damage of the boat/ship was what protected it from greater harm, for the King would not take a damaged ship/boat and that appeared to be the greatest act of kindness Al-Khidr did to them.

Second Journey: *As for the second event, Almighty Allah explained in the following verse:* As for the youth his parents were people of Faith and we feared that he would grieve them by obstinate rebellion and ingratitude (to Allah and man).³⁵

It has become clearer from the above quoted verse that Al-Khidr was inspired by Almighty Allah that the boy would become ungrateful, disobedient and parricide and that Allah was to bless his parents with another more virtuous, pious and grateful son. It could be suggested that had the boy lived, he would have been destined for hell but his death, at a young age, meant he was destined to enter Paradise. Thus, his death was beneficial to the society, to his parents and himself.

Ali, while commenting on verse eighty of Surah al-Kahf added that:

...Khidr knew that the youth was a potential parricide. His parents were worthy, pious people, who had brought him up with love. He had apparently gone wrong. Perhaps he

33 Yusuf Ali, Op. Cit footnote 2422, Chapter 18:79

³² Qur'an 18:79.

³⁴ Jalal al-Deen al-Muhalli and Jalal al-Deen al-Suyuti, Tafsir al-Jalalayn, Vol.5, P. 218 sourced in Maktabat al-ShamelahSoftware.

³⁵ Qur'an 18:80.

had already been guilty of murders... the youth was a source of extreme sorrow and humiliation to his parents. His parents were promised a better-behaved son who would love them and be a credit to them...³⁶

Third Journey: As for the third event, there was a treasure which was kept in the collapsing building belonging to two orphan boys which would not be possible for them to get if Al-Khidr did not erect it. On this note, Almighty Allah enunciates in the verse of the Qur'an:

As for the wall it belonged to two youths orphans in the Town; there was beneath it a buried treasure to which they were entitled: their father had been a righteous man: so thy Lord desired that they should attain their age of full strength and get out their treasure a mercy (and favor) from thy Lord. I did it not of my own accord. Such is the interpretation of (those things) over which thou wast unable to hold patience.³⁷

The treasure buried in the building would have been exposed to view if the wall had been allowed to go down, and would have been stolen by the people of the village folk, who had shown their true character by refusing all hospitality to weary travelers.

In fact, when al- Khidr passed by the wall he saw that it was about to fall and so he fixed the wall to ensure that the treasure would remain safe until the orphans reached maturity on the instruction given to him by Allah. No doubt, these three journeys undertook by Prophet Musa taught him the virtue of patience and equipped him with the necessary knowledge to complete his assigned duties with the Israelites.³⁸

Derivable Lessons in the Narrative:

After careful study of the narrative, some important lessons that should be embraced by all Muslims could be highlighted. These include but not limited to:

1. In Islam, pride is not allowed for any kind of success be it spiritual or mundane type. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was to reported to have explained that "one will not enter paradise, if one has an atom's weight of arrogance in one's heart". In fact, Almighty Allah also mentions in His Book that "And when it is said to him, guard against Allah, pride carries him off to sin; therefore, hell is sufficient for him; and certainly, it is an evil resting place".³⁹

³⁶ Yusuf Ali, Op. Cit, Footnote 2423 Chapter 18:80.

³⁷ Our'an 18:82.

³⁸ https://www.amrkhaled.net/articles/articles3270.html, as at 2010-04-10

³⁹ Our'an 2:206

- **2.** Allah, the Exalted, is never angry with His chosen servants for making mistake (s); instead, He provides them with more knowledge for better appreciation of His Divine power.
- 3. Acquisition of knowledge entails a great deal of hard work and patience. And that is why Islam recognizes its value and types and encourages its followers to use their knowledge with a view to benefiting themselves and others. It is thus, never easy in any way and it is also unlimited.
- 4. For learning to be blessed, students must respect teachers. And the best way you can show respect to your teachers is by listening to them and following their instructions. This can be seen when Prophet Musa though a prominent Prophet, addressed his teacher, Al-Khidr, politely, gently and respectfully.
- 5. Share travelling information with even servants while on journey is very good. This is evident when Prophet Musa told his servant the direction of their journey and the destination before their arrival.
- 6. Almighty Allah, knows everything and such knowledge is not limited to something specific issues He granted to His Prophets and His other chosen servants. This was succinctly captured in the Qur'an where He mentioned that "...So that you might know that Allah has power over all things and that Allah encompasses all things in His knowledge⁴⁰".
- 7. It is also one of the conditions for search of knowledge that a student should not initiate any discussion on matters hidden to him until he is allowed by his teacher to do so. This could be achieved by following a clear and defined instructions and methodologies when seeking to know certain things. He should also be prepared to sacrifice all his time, energy and means to seeking knowledge and must not get fed up with it regardless of what the situation is.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it could be understood that the narrative of Prophet Musa and Khidr is a rich and thought-provoking narrative that unveils hidden matters and imparts important lessons. The narrative emphasizes the importance of firmness, humility, patience and good intention as the foundation in the search of knowledge. It is also learnt that we should always appreciate the hidden matters and wisdom that lie beyond our immediate perception. Learnt from this narrative is the fact that no matter the level of one's knowledge it cannot be compared with Allah's general and specific knowledge. Prophet Musa presented himself in a very best manner before his teacher while searching for knowledge, the character and discipline which should be imbibed by every student of knowledge. It's equally imperative to maintain teacher-student relation-ship so as to enhance easy and conducive atmosphere for learning and good understanding of knowledge. It is interesting to however, note that Prophet Musa despite the fact that he

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⁴⁰ Qur'an 65:12

was one of the Ulul Azm,⁴¹ surrendered himself before Prophet al-Khidr as a student, one of the good things that enabled him to learn.

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⁴¹ This refers to chosen Prophets such as Muhammad, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and Isa (AS) who were given high position and dignity by Almighty Allah over other Prophets. See Qur'an:337 and 20:115

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