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Khizr-i Rāh: The Pre-Eminent Guide to Action in Muhammad Iqbal's Thought¹

IRFAN A. OMAR

گر خضر در بحر کشتی را نکست صد درستی در غلستی خضر هست²

If Khizr were to break the ship in the sea
A hundred good reasons lie in Khidr's deed.

Al-Khidr (variously pronounced as al-Khaḍir, Khizr, Hizir or simply Khidr) is known as the immortal guide in the Islamic tradition. He is the Muslim equivalent of Elijah, a prophet by some accounts and a mysterious "servant of God" by others. Although he has many names, al-Khidr itself means "the green one", perhaps indicative of his characteristic of making things green, or to his regenerative qualities in general. The story of Khidr is embedded in the Qur'an as God's "servant" while his name appears in the *tafsir* literature. According to many *mufasssirūn*, the mysterious person mentioned in *Sūrah* 18:65 (Khidr-Moses episode) is none other than Khidr. In Islamic history, many have made use of the symbolism that Khidr carries — in poetry and other Sufi writings as well as in the massive literature known as *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (stories of prophets).³ Poets such as Rūmī and Ḥafiz to Ghālib and Iqbal all

¹ I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor Riaz Umar, former principal of Zakir Hussain College, University of Delhi, who over a decade ago, first encouraged me to pursue "Khizr-i Rāh" and to attempt to discover the unique manner in which Iqbal looks at the person of Khidr.

² Maulānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnavi-i Ma'navi* (Lahore: Mu'assasah-i Intishārāt-i Islāmi, 1398/1978), 1: 55.

³ Wheeler M. Thackston, *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisāi* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978). For a brief discussion of Khidr in Islam, see A.J. Wensinck, "Khaḍir", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, no. 29 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1925) and Irfan A. Omar, "Khidr in the Islamic Tradition", *Muslim World*, 83 (July-October 1993), 279–94; for Khidr in the Qur'an and *tafsir* literature, see Hifz al-Raḥmān, *Qiṣaṣ al-Qur'an* (Delhi: Nadwat al-Muṣannifin, 1975) and various other *tafsir* from both the classical and modern periods. For myths and legends surrounding Khidr, see Haim Schwarzbaum, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends in Islamic Folk Literature* (Waldorf-

have invoked Khidr for the purpose of highlighting their respective visions through him. In Iqbal, however, Khidr occupies a rather nuanced role; a role that both conforms as well as distinguishes itself from that given to Khidr by many previous mystically-inclined poets. This essay explores the role of Khidr in Muhammad Iqbal's thought.

Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), the poet-philosopher of the south Asian subcontinent, is famous for his bold, uplifting and inspiring poetry. Iqbal was a poet first, and remained that throughout his life, but he was also a thinker and a philosopher. The combination of the two gave him the charisma that captured the Muslim imagination. Iqbal was no doubt the most sought out Muslim figure of the twentieth century; both the religiously inclined as well as the literary minded drew inspiration from him.⁴ Through his poetry, which deeply reflected his philosophical thinking, Iqbal sought to awaken the Muslim mind to the growing indifference to eternal values in the name of rational thought and material prosperity. He had a deep reverence for spiritual traditions, in particular for Sufism, but the form of spirituality he advocated required activism rather than resignation from the world as such.

Iqbal's philosophy of 'action' is rendered mostly in verse and in that he has effectively used the symbolism of Khidr to convey his message against stagnation and *taqlid* (unquestioned following of traditions) and in support of a regenerative, life-giving action. The preeminence of Khidr in Iqbal's thought is nowhere more obvious than in his poem titled "Khidr-i Rāh" (The Guide), which is one of the last poems in the collection called *Bāng-i Darā* (The Call of the Way); Iqbal's first published collection of Urdu poems.⁵ Here Iqbal describes Khidr as an unseen but pre-eminent guide to a searching believer. In "Khidr-i Rāh" Iqbal explores a vision of life, which, although seemingly ravaged by the passing of time, in fact represents a dynamic nature of reality. Out of the ordinary movement of life evolves a "rhythm" reflective in the story of Khidr — unceasing and unhindered, where death is viewed as but a small wayside station in the ultimate journey. It is in the context of Khidr, then, that for Iqbal in the midst of "the devastating aspect of time" emerges another concept of time which can be described as a "ceaseless duration".

Hessen: Verlag für Orientkunde, 1982). For the symbolism and folkloristic aspects of the person of Khidr, see Irfan A. Omar, "The Symbol of Immortality: Some Popular Images of Khidr in the Orient", *Islamic Culture*, vol. 74, no. 3 (July 2000), 33–51.

⁴ See Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Nuqūsh-i Iqbāl* (Lucknow, India: Majlis Tahqīqāt-ō Nashriyāt-i Islām, 1994 [1985]).

⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, "Khidr-i Rāh", in *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl: Urdū* (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1984 [1973]), 255–276.

From this perspective life is not measurable in serial time; it is rather seen as "overflowing, eternal and evergreen."⁶

This theme of eternity within, in spite of our bondage to, this serial time permeates Iqbal's other poems as well. In *Asrār-i Khudī* (The Secrets of the Self), *Payām-i Mashriq* (Message from the East) and also in *Nawā-i Waqt* (The Melody of Time), Iqbal consistently deals with the problem of time, destiny and the relationship between the Infinite and the finite where Khidr symbolism plays an important part in the equation.

Khidr appears in Iqbal in a variety of ways; sometimes in the context of "greening of the mountain tops" and sometimes referring to the foiled attempt of Alexander in finding the 'fountain of Life'; in all instances a sense of an untiring wanderer echoes evenly:

جفا کشی کا خطر کیسے ان کسانوں کو یہ سبز کرتے ہیں کہسار کی چٹانوں کو⁷

Call these farmers the embodiment of Khidr of toil and labour;
As they turn the mountain rocks into green.

and,

ہاتھ دھو بیٹھ آب حیاوں سے، خدا جانے کہاں خضر نے اس کو چھپا کر اے سکندر رکھ دیا

Give up searching for the living water as God knows whither;
O Alexander, Khizr has hidden it.⁸

Like many other poets in history Iqbal used the imagery of Khidr to enhance his message of optimism in immortal terms. He depicts the figure of Khidr as a spiritual "guide".⁹ Iqbal himself drew spiritual guidance from Khidr and expressed the possibilities of conventional wisdom in the guise of lyrical beauty. In the following verses from "Khizr-i Rāh", Khidr relates the answers to Iqbal's questions concerning the condition of the Muslim world:

کیا سنا تا ہے مجھے ترک و عرب کی داستاں مجھ سے کچھ پنہاں نہیں اسلاموں کا سوز و ساز¹⁰

What do you relate the story of the Turk and the Arab ?

The tragedy of the people of Islam is nothing of a secret to me.¹¹

⁶ S. Alam Khundmiri, "Conception of Time", in Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 250.

⁷ Muhammad Iqbal, *Sarōd-i Raftab*, ed. Ghulam Rasool Mehr and Sadiq Ali Dilawari (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1959), 244-45.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Anwar Beg, *The Poet of the East* (Lahore: Khawar Publishing Cooperative Society, 1961), 115-6.

¹⁰ Muhammad Iqbal, "Khizr-i Rāh" in *Kulliyāt Iqbal: Urdū*, 264.

¹¹ Anwar Beg, *The Poet of the East*, 115-6.

But to Iqbal the person of Khidr represents more than just a guide (Khidr-i Rāh); rather he sees him as an embodiment of the secret of immortality. In many ways Iqbal revises the logic of viewing Khidr's role by proclaiming him both an 'immortal guide' and a 'guide to immortality'. In the former sense, Khidr exists as part of a long tradition of attracting seekers to spiritual discipline where the latter draw upon him for spiritual guidance.

In the latter sense, the immortal status of this guide presupposes a state of immortality, which is the goal of all seekers. Thus while Khidr's immortality ensures his continued guidance forever, what draws one to immortality is the state of being called *maqām al-Khidr*, where the epitomization of essential Khidrīan traits become a reality. This state of being is the state of "positive action". For in Iqbal, the virtue of "action" is life itself and so long as there is action, there is life. Again Iqbal, putting the words in the mouth of the Prophet Khidr, says:

پختہ تر ہے گردشِ پیہم سے جامِ زندگی ہے یہی اے بے خبر راژ دوامِ زندگی

Constant circulation makes the cup of life more durable,
O ignorant one! This is the very secret of life's immortality.¹³

This philosophy of action expressed in Khidrīan terms is quite similar to the story of Gilgamesh. As the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Sumerian hero, poses the perennial question, that is of immortality, it very much seeks to highlight Gilgamesh's attempt to achieve "personal immortality, eternal youth, [and] lasting fame. . . [but] only to fail in every attempt."¹⁴ In the end, however, as the author of *The Sunlight Dialogues* puts it, Gilgamesh finds the answer to the question of immortality in the "ultimate act, the act which comes when the gods command it", an utterly impersonal act of death.¹⁵

It seems that death is impossible to overcome and immortality is nothing but an illusion of the mind. And yet when all "illusions of personal immortality are stripped away, there is only the act to maintain the freedom to act."¹⁶ For in Iqbal also we find that the immortality of the human soul is seen not in the simplistic, dualistic opposition of the soul to the body, but

¹² Muhammad Iqbal, "Khidr-i Rāh" in *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl: Urdū*, 258.

¹³ Anwar Beg, *The Poet of the East*, 198, translation modified.

¹⁴ John Gardner and John Maier, *Gilgamesh: Translated From the Sin-Legi-Unnini Version* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1984), 6.

¹⁵ John Gardner, *The Sunlight Dialogues* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 533.

¹⁶ John Gardner & John Maier, *Gilgamesh*, 6. The Epic of Gilgamesh is a story of despair and hope, of death and immortality. It reveals a message of life in the language of death through the medium of verse in more ways than it symbolizes utter despair.

rather in its (soul's) interplay with the ego, which Iqbal called *khudī*. Iqbal says, "the life of the ego is a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and environment invading the ego".¹⁷ Thus, immortality is not simply being human and possessing a soul, rather it lies in an active interplay of the ego with the environment which in turn creates a constant tension between the two, contributing to the ever-enhancement and perfection of the ego drawing oneself away from the clutches of fatalism (*qismat*).¹⁸

Ego in Iqbal is seen as a "unity of mental states". It is a free personal causality that is primarily of the will, with the body being its instrument; this unity, moreover, is "absolutely unique."¹⁹ Furthermore, the selfhood or self-affirmation is this ego's worldly manifestation. Achieving this unity will allow the Divine will to "flow through the human soul, filling and transforming it, until one reaches conformity with one's destined fate."²⁰ To Iqbal, the development of the ego is the most important task that ultimately leads one to the highest form of self-affirmation, that of being an "individual" which is self-contained, unique and centred. Thus as Iqbal remembers McTaggart by saying, the "Universe is an association of individuals" and God Himself is an individual although He in his majesty represents the Perfect Individual, the Absolute Ego, the Center of all centers.²¹

Iqbal, like Rūmī, believed in personal immortality (of the soul) and that achieving this immortality required a strong determination on the part of each individual. In other words, it is by self-effort and strong will that one may attain it, just as we have seen in the example of Gilgamesh. Thus the imagery and symbolism of Khidr in Iqbal's thought highlights the need for the ultimate effort (action) on the part of human beings. Iqbal says, ... "personal immortality, then, is not ours as of right; it is to be achieved by personal effort."²² This personal effort is translated into the notion to act where an individual attains immortality by virtue of his/her will and an acquired power to act rather than by virtue of just being. In this sense, immortality is not a given thing; it is not just there, it is an "earned immortality."²³ The German poet Goethe (1749-1832), one of Iqbal's Western mentors, whom he read and

¹⁷ Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Delhi: Kitāb Bhavan, 1998, 6th reprint), 102.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Muhammad Maruf, "Allama Iqbal on Immortality", *Religious Studies*, 18 (Summer 1982), 376ff.

²⁰ Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 147.

²¹ Beg, *The Poet of the East*, 189.

²² Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 119.

²³ Maruf, "Allama Iqbal on Immortality", 377.

admired, echoes a similar philosophy of action, "striving and willing and accomplishing."

He who toils forever striving,
Him can we redeem.²⁴

There is much here that resembles Iqbal's notion of *khudī* and his perception of Khidr as one who epitomizes, albeit symbolically, striving and action. It is not surprising that Iqbal is said to have had a meaningful engagement with Goethe despite the latter's likeness for Ḥāfiẓ whom Iqbal criticized.

Immortality implies some sense of continuity of what we call life. In Iqbal, this continuity is spelled out in terms of a continuous development of the ego. As the ego in this physical life aims at its perfection by use of the physical structure — that is our body — it actually aims to survive this structure itself, which is necessitated at the event of death. Beyond death the ego survives, if it does, in a different state of consciousness which, in the Islamic tradition, is known as *'alam al-barzakh* — a state between death and resurrection.²⁵ But the ultimate stage for the integration of the immortal ego is its attainment of eternity or, religiously speaking, heaven, which is the culmination of both life and love:

جوہر زندگی ہے عشق جوہر عشق ہے خودی

[If] the essence of life is love,
The essence of love is ego.²⁶

Even as the ego (*khudī*) contains the potential of perfection of the soul it seeks the guidance of those perfected egos that have, by their own striving as well as God's intervention, already had a glimpse of that elevated state of consciousness. Khidr, in Iqbal's view, symbolizes one such guiding Ego. Furthermore, as one whom God calls "one of Our servants" Khidr typifies the act-bound Ego, who is busy implementing divine will in human space.²⁷ Therefore, *it is by virtue of his power to act that Khidr is immortal.*

²⁴ Cited in Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966 [1904]), xi.

²⁵ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 120.

²⁶ Fayyaz Mahmood, "Iqbal's Attitude Towards God", in Raziuddin & others, *Iqbal as a Thinker* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1973 [1944]), 277.

²⁷ As mentioned above, the Qur'an (18: 65) refers to Khidr, without naming him as such, as "one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed Mercy from Ourselves and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own presence". English tr. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, New Edition (Brentwood, MD: Amana Corporation, 1992).

تعمیر خودی میں ہے خدائی

In the nurturing of *khudī* lies the secret of Godhead²⁸

The concept of *khudī* (self or ego) characterizes Iqbal's thought more than anything else. The essence of his message lies in understanding the "secrets of the self." Iqbal, as evidenced from the above verse, disdained those who make no effort on their part to nurture their *khudī* and are simply waiting for another 'messiah' to appear, whether it is Khidr, Mahdī or Jesus. For Iqbal, the ego is both "single and manifold, both hidden and open."²⁹ The ego is preserved as a separate entity; separate from the divine and yet completely dependent. Thus Iqbal's philosophy is opposed to the monistic understanding held by some Muslim mystics, such as those of the school of Ibn 'Arabī, who argued in favor of the idea of *wahdat al-wujūd* or the "unity of Being."³⁰ As mentioned above, Iqbal conceives the idea of unity in terms of "will" rather than "being", arguing that there is no "Universal life" from which all else emanated and hence longs for reunification, constituting the great oneness of all. In Iqbal, God and human beings are distinct, and there is hardly any room for self-annihilation; rather it is the opposite, the self-affirmation, which allows the full realization of the Self. Unlike in pantheistic Sufism where the human soul seeks to merge itself into the Divine, in Iqbal the human will seeks to unite with the Divine will which allows the latter to flow through the former, hence preserving the individuality of both, and fulfilling the human goal of the realization of the self. To Iqbal, the ego never merges itself into the "ocean", as it were, of the Godhead to the extent where it (like a drop of water in the ocean) completely loses its identity. But there hangs always this paradox of *union in separation and separation in union*:

خودی روشن ز نور کبریائی است رسائی ہائے او از نارسائی است
خدائی از مقامات وصالش وصالش از مقاماتِ خدائی است³¹

The Self is brilliant by the light of Divine grandeur,
Its reachings are from its not-reaching,

²⁸ Mahmood, "Iqbal's Attitude Towards God", 282.

²⁹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), 103.

³⁰ The notion of *wahdat al-wujūd* was enunciated by the famous Andalusian Sufi, Ibn 'Arabī (d. 536/1240) who believed in the ultimate unity of the human soul and God. See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

³¹ Muhammad Iqbal, "Kladi" in *Armaghān-i Hijāz, Kulliyāt Iqbal: Fārisī* (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali, 1973), 121/1003. For the English translation of these lines see Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, 139.

Its separation is a station of the stations of union,
Its union is one of the stations of separation.

Iqbal stood against the resigning spiritualism of his day, whose origin he attributed to the development of the Persian Neoplatonism within the intellectual history of Islam.³² Thus we can see that despite his love for the Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, Iqbal rejected the pantheistic elements in Mevlānā's thought. However, in Rūmī he saw more than pantheism; he saw an "advocate of spiritual development. . . [and] the infinite quest for God."³³ Through his poetry of "action" Iqbal drove out all three: the poet from the tavern; the Sufi from his *khānqāh* (monastery), and the preacher from his mosque. His poetry is essentially a critique of the perpetual inaction of these three roles, traditionally manifested by a self-centred poet, a resigned mystic and a literalist religious *imām*. He confronts these three characters by way of a dialogue with Khidr who, as a symbol of life through action, appealed to Iqbal in almost every aspect of his philosophical outreach. Iqbal was certainly not against these vocations *per se*; rather, he sought to drive out the stigma of spiritual and social stagnation that these roles seemed to have brought about.

One day Khidr appeared to Iqbal and said, "If the eye of the heart be open, the destiny of the world is unveiled." Iqbal, therefore, questioned Khidr:

چھوڑ کر آبادیاں رہتا ہے تو صحرا نورد زندگی تیری ہے بے روز و شب و فردا و دوش
زندگی کا راز کیا ہے؟ سلطنت کیا چیز ہے؟ اور یہ سرمایہ و محنت میں ہے کیسا خرّوش؟³⁴

Away from inhabitation you roam the desert,
Your life is devoid of day and night; today and tomorrow;
What is the secret of life; what is kingship
And what is this conflict between capital and labour.

To this Khidr replied:

کیوں تعجب ہے مری صحرا نوردی پر تجھے؟ یہ نگا پوئے دامد زندگی کی ہے دلیل³⁵

Why do you wonder over my rambles in the desert?
This constant motion is the potent sign of life.

³² A. H. Kamali, "The Heritage of Islamic Thought" in Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, 211.

³³ Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 384.

³⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, "Khidr-i Rāh" in *Kulliyāt-i Iqbal: Urdū*, 256.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 257

and,

اپنی دنیا آپ پیدا کر اگر زندوں میں ہے سزا آدم ہے ضمیر کن نکال ہے زندگی!³⁶

Create your own world if you are among the living,
Life is the secret of Adam, the conscience of life itself!³⁷

Iqbal's message is filled with optimism as he constantly reminds us to "hope." It is hope that motivates one to action that eventually leads one to self-determination and self-affirmation³⁸ as opposed to self-annihilation a la monistic Sufism. In this, Iqbal invites every individual to become, as it were, a substitute for Khidr just as the latter is seen to substitute for Moses' "perceptivity"³⁹ in the Qur'anic episode narrating the encounter between Moses and Khidr.⁴⁰

خضر باشد موسیٰ اداراک را

Being a Khidr to the Moses of perception.⁴¹

But the optimism of Iqbal uses the figure of Khidr in an antinomian way as well. Reminding us of the "fool of God", who, unlike so many others, does not seek help from Khidr, Iqbal says:

اے تنک آں تشہ کاندرا آفتاب می نخواهد از خضر یک جام آب⁴²

Happy is the man who, though thirsty in the sun,
Does not beg of Khidr a cup of water in such need.⁴³

Iqbal's reference here is to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) as the "Perfect Man" which highlights the idea of complete trust in God (*tawakkul*).

³⁶ Ibid., 259.

³⁷ Anwar Beg, *The Poet of the East*, 198ff, translation modified.

³⁸ Muhammad Iqbal, *Asrār-i Khudī*, translation into English with Notes and Introduction by R. A. Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self* (Lahore: Farhan Publishers, 1977), xiii.

³⁹ Yusuf S. Chishti, *Sharh-i Asrār-i Khudī* (Lahore: Ishrat Publishing House, n.d.), 276.

⁴⁰ Sura 18:60-82; cf. Omar, "Khidr in the Islamic Tradition", 280.

⁴¹ Iqbal, *Asrār-i Khudī*, translated by Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self*, 24. Iqbal often portrays various prophetic figures such as Adam, Abraham, Moses and Khidr with having various strengths. At times Moses is seen as "superior" to Khidr and at other occasions, as in the case above, Khidr seems to be substituting Moses' superior perception (*idrāk*). Cf. Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, 264.

⁴² Muhammad Iqbal, "Asrār-i Khudī" in *Kulliyāt Iqbāl: Fārisī*, 24.

⁴³ Beg, *The Poet of the East*, 124.

It seems that Iqbal wants us to look up to Khidr as a guide but not become completely dependent on him. In fact each seeker should strive to be Khidr-like. Hajviri in his *Kashf al-Mahjub* mentions one of the "servants" of God named Ibrahim b. Ahmad al-Khawwas who was asked by Khidr for his company. Al-Khawwas refused fearing that he "might put confidence in him [Khidr] instead of in God",⁴⁴ Similarly, while protesting against *taqlid*, Iqbal says:

تقلید کی روش سے تو بہتر ہے خود کشی رستہ بھی ڈھونڈو، خضر کا سودا بھی چھوڑ دے
مینار دل پر اپنے خدا کا نزل دیکھ اور انتظار مہدی و عیسیٰ بھی چھوڑ دے

Better annihilate yourself than to follow blindly,
Forget the dealings with Khidr, rather search on your own;
See the descent of divine in the sanctuary of your heart,
And quit waiting for Mahdi or Jesus.⁴⁵

In conclusion, it should be noted that although Iqbal's philosophy — not unlike many schools of Sufism — validates Khidr's high function as a guide, it cautions against spiritual dependence of others, Messiah included, for one's ultimate salvation. For Iqbal *taqlid* is synonymous with death and creativity and self-action is life. Thus though Khidr is indeed a guide sought out by many, yet he should be a *guide to action* rather than to a sort of spiritual resignation found among many mystics who invest great hopes in the supposed spiritual powers of their guide (*shaykh*).

Iqbal appeals primarily to the heart rather than to the mind.⁴⁶ His poems are filled with passion. Iqbal's understanding of esoteric Islam furnishes him with ideas that lie dormant in a normal state of being. But his usage of the Khidr symbolism evokes the riot in his expression which, coupled with his ability to express it passionately through the medium of verse, renders it very unconventionally. But more than anything, to Iqbal a true poet is analogous to Khidr in that they both seek to guide others to the "fountain of Life" (in Iqbal, synonymous with action) and hence the poet is likened to "Khidr-i Rāh."⁴⁷ In

⁴⁴ Sayyid 'Ali ibn 'Uthmān al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, tr. R. A. Nicholson (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1911), 153, 290.

⁴⁵ Abdul Hakim Khalifa, *Fikr-i Iqbal* (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbal, 1957), 20. [For the first couplet, see Muhammad Iqbal, "Ghazliyat" in *Bāng-i Drā* in *Kulliyāt Iqbal: Urdū*, 107. However, we could not locate the second couplet there. Ed.]

⁴⁶ Cf. Beg, *Poet of the East*, 211. See also Nicholson's Introduction in Iqbal, *Asrār-i Khudī*, trans. Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self*, viii.

⁴⁷ Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, 61.

so far as Iqbal somehow confounds the role of a poet with a Sufi. He thus describes the poet:

فکر او با ماه و انجم ہم نشین زشت را ناآشنا، خوب آفرین
خضر و در ظلمات او آب حیات زنده تراز آب چشمش کائنات⁴⁸

His thoughts dwell with the moon and the stars,
He creates beauty in that which is ugly and strange;
He is a Khizr, and amidst his darkness is the Fountain of Life:
All things that exist are made more living by his tears.⁴⁹

Such a person as described in these verses is not just a poet who calls people to action for just any reason but rather who calls people to 'act' in the path of God, striving to achieve unity with the Divine. Here Iqbal combines the roles of a mystic and a poet into one wholesome being such as Khidr who is at once a "knower" as well as a proactive "guide". His is a prophetic calling and he undertakes acts that are seemingly defiant of God's law (as Khidr appeared to Moses in the story related in Qur'ān 18: 60-82) but in actual fact are divinely ordained and ultimately beneficial to all. Thus, it is not surprising that such an ideal poet in Iqbal's mind is none other than the great master Rūmī, who is both a mystic — having attained the knowledge of God (*irfān*) — and a poet, who communicates or transmits this knowledge to others in subtle ways and in sublime verses. In another poem in collection *Bāng-i Darā* Iqbal says:

کام دنیا میں رہبری ہے مرا مثل خضر تجھ سے پا ہوں میں⁵⁰

My task is to be a guide in this world
Like Khidr I am constantly on the go.

Not only did Iqbal see himself in this fold of being as an embodiment of the role of Khidr but he himself perceived Rumi, the great mystical genius, as his own "Khidr" who had tremendous influence over him both in the content of his thought, and the style of his expression of that thought.⁵¹ In fact, the

⁴⁸ Muhammad Iqbal, "Dar Ḥaḳīqat-i Shi'r wa Iṣlāḥ-i Adbiyyāt Islāmiyyah" in *Asrār-i Khudī in Kulliyāt Iqbāl: Fārsī*, 35.

⁴⁹ Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self*, 62ff.

⁵⁰ Muhammad Iqbal, "Aql-ō Dil" in *Kulliyāt Iqbāl: Urdū*, 41.

⁵¹ M. M. Sharif, *About Iqbal and his Thought* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1964).

Khidr in Iqbal's famous poem, "Khidr-i Rāh" is symbolized by none other than Rūmī.⁵²



⁵² Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, 264, 357. Professor Schimmel reports that in recognition of the spiritual connection Iqbal had to Rumi, the Turks have carved out a 'maqam' for Iqbal in the garden adjacent to the mausoleum of Mawlana Rumi in Konya. See her *Deciphering the Signs of God*, 55.