

The Esoteric Journey of Mūsā (AS) in the Mirror of al-Asfār al-Arba‘a: An Anfusī Interpretation of the Qur’anic Narrative of Mūsā and Khidhr

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Introduction

The Qur’anic narrative of Mūsā and Khidhr is one of the most profound accounts in the Qur’an-rich not only in its outward meaning but also in its mystical and inward (anfusī) dimensions. The story contains hidden wisdoms that play an essential role in spiritual development and ethical refinement. In al-Asfār al-arba‘a, Mullā Ṣadrā conceptualizes four spiritual journeys as stages of mystical growth: min al-khalq ilā al-Ḥaqq (from creation to the Truth), fī al-Ḥaqq bi’l-Ḥaqq (within the Truth by the Truth), min al-Ḥaqq ilā al-khalq bi’l-Ḥaqq (from the Truth back to creation with the Truth), and fī al-khalq ma‘a al-Ḥaqq (in creation with the Truth). This framework offers a powerful interpretive lens for understanding the story narrated in verses 60-82 of Sūrat al-Kahf.

The aim of this study is to analyze and reinterpret this narrative through the structure of the four journeys, extracting its inward meanings to shed light on the human relationship with divine realities and the path of spiritual ascent.

Methodology

This research employs an analytical, descriptive, and comparative approach. To achieve its goals:

- Foundational Islamic sources-including the Qur’an, mystical commentaries, and philosophical works such as Mullā Ṣadrā’s *al-Asfār al-arba‘a*-were utilized.
- The story of Mūsā and Khidhr served as the central focus of examination, interpreted through an inward (anfusī) exegetical lens and correlated with the four mystical journeys.
- The analysis involved extracting mystical and philosophical concepts from the narrative and mapping them onto the structure of *al-Asfār al-arba‘a*.

First, various mystical and inward commentaries on the narrative were reviewed. Then, using a comparative method, the story was aligned with the four spiritual journeys to unveil its deeper mystical architecture. In this interpretive model, key narrative elements-characters, locations, and events-are treated as symbolic representations of the stages of spiritual wayfaring. The study thus adopts an innovative approach, highlighting the profound interconnections between inward exegesis and the metaphysical framework of *al-Asfār al-arba‘a*.

Findings

Mystical exegetes view the narrative of Mūsā and Khidhr as an allegory of spiritual journeying. When aligned with Mullā Ṣadrā’s *al-Asfār al-arba‘a*, the story illustrates the human ascent from



creation toward God and the subsequent return to creation through divine knowledge. The comparative study yields the following results:

1. **First Journey (*min al-khalq ilā al-Ḥaqq*) - From creation to the Truth:**

This journey involves spiritual awakening and movement toward divine reality. Mūsā, by seeking Khidhr-symbol of the perfect spiritual master-undergoes stages of purification. Incidents such as the scuttling of the boat (symbol of self-discipline) and the killing of the youth (the abandonment of egoistic desires) reflect the transition from multiplicity toward unity.

2. **Second Journey (*fī al-Ḥaqq bi'l-Ḥaqq*) - Within the Truth by the Truth:**

Here the seeker attains deeper knowledge of the Divine Essence and Attributes. Through witnessing Khidhr's acts, Mūsā gains insight into divine wisdom. Recognizing human limitation and beholding divine wisdom lead him toward *fanā'* in the Divine Essence and Attributes.

3. **Third Journey (*min al-Ḥaqq ilā al-khalq bi'l-Ḥaqq*) - From the Truth to creation with the Truth:**

In this stage, proper to accomplished gnostics, the seeker returns to guide others. Mūsā, after attaining divine knowledge through Khidhr's actions, resumes his prophetic mission to guide the Children of Israel. This stage reflects the realm of divine acts and the station of spiritual authority (*wilāyah*).

4. **Fourth Journey (*fī al-khalq ma'a al-Ḥaqq*) - In creation with the Truth:**

The seeker perceives divine unity within the created world, witnessing God's beauty in all things. Mūsā, observing the manifestation of divine wisdom in Khidhr's actions, reaches *baqā'* after *fanā'*. With spiritual insight into divine wisdom, he attains the station of legislative prophethood.

Overall, the findings show that the narrative of Mūsā and Khidhr reflects a complete map of spiritual wayfaring and the stages of the soul's ascent.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the narrative of Mūsā and Khidhr serves as a profound symbolic account of spiritual wayfaring and can be systematically interpreted through Mullā Ṣadrā's four journeys:

- **First Journey:** Mūsā transcends egoic veils through companionship with Khidhr, approaching absolute unity.
- **Second Journey:** Insight into divine wisdom and knowledge of God's Names and Attributes lead him to *fanā'*.
- **Third Journey:** Having witnessed divine reality, Mūsā embarks upon his mission to guide creation.
- **Fourth Journey:** After *fanā'*, Mūsā attains *baqā'* and perceives divine wisdom in the world.

The study concludes that the narrative contains deep mystical and inward (*anfusi*) meanings that offer a spiritual model for human development. Its application within the framework of *al-Asfār al-arba'a* provides practical guidance for self-purification and the path of spiritual ascent.

Keywords

story of Mūsā and Khidhr; inward (*anfusi*) exegesis; *al-Asfār al-arba'a*.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with research ethics. The authors observed the ethical principles in conducting and publishing this scholarly research, and this is confirmed by all of them.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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