

# **The Eliatic Function in the Islamic Tradition: Khiṛ and the Maḥdī<sup>1</sup>**

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“Peace be upon Elias.”

Thus indeed do We recompense the virtuous...

*(Salāmun ‘alā ‘Ilyāsìn. ‘Innā kadhālika najzil-muṣsinìn)*

*(Quran 37:130-131)<sup>2</sup>*

## **Abstract:**

The present article is an in depth examination of the role of Khiṛ and the Maḥdī in the Islamic tradition, focusing on their significance as spiritual guides, transmitters of sacred knowledge and on their importance in the preparation for the end of time. The author uses the concept of the 'Eliatic function' presented by Leo Schaya as a guiding principle for this study, and begins the article with an explanation of this concept. On the basis of this, he then discusses the traditional Islamic understanding firstly of Khiṛ and then of the Maḥdī. Throughout the analysis the author presents quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith along with the interpretations of classical and contemporary commentators, focusing in particular on Shi'ism and Sufism.

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## Introduction

This essay takes as its starting point Leo Schaya's seminal article "The Eliatic Function,"<sup>3</sup> where the author sheds light on the esoteric and universal function of Elijah or Elias ('Ilyās in Arabic),<sup>4</sup> mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, Gospel, and Quran, and revered as a prophet of God by Jews, Christians and Muslims. Concerning Elias and the Eliatic function, Schaya writes,

Through the words of Elisha, the Scripture (II *Kings* II, 1-18) shows that Elias could not be found because he had truly been raised to heaven. Now according to Judeo-Christian tradition the prophet Elias not only ascended alive to heaven, but has, since his ascension, descended many times in secret and continues mysteriously to make himself known on earth. And thus, in Judaism, he is invisibly present at every circumcision of a male infant on the eighth day after his birth, and also at every Passover meal celebrated by families; in addition, he reveals himself to certain spiritual persons in order to initiate them into the Mysteries of the Scripture. To the majority of Israel his presence signifies the blessing which descends directly from heaven, and to the elect more particularly he represents the illuminating influence. The Eliatic manifestation is destined, in a world which is moving towards its end, to revive the study and observance of the Law of Moses and, in particular, the spiritual realization of his Mysteries.<sup>5</sup>

It is recorded in the Gospel that John the Baptist (Yačyā) is asked, "... 'Art thou Elias?' And he saith, 'I am not....'" (John 1:21), while Jesus the Messiah ('psā al-Masiē) proclaims: "And if ye will receive

it, [John] is Elias, which was for to come.” (Matthew 11:14) These apparently contradictory statements do not imply the literal transmigration or reincarnation of the soul of Elias-which John categorically denied-but John’s association by Jesus with the spiritual archetype and function of Elias.<sup>6</sup> The Eliatic function is invested in particular chosen souls, either prophets (*anbiyāʾ*) or friends (*awliyāʾ*) of God who often live miraculously long lives, traversing and connecting the Divine, angelic and corporeal worlds and even human epochs to initiate and guide men and women in dreams, visions, and encounters in the flesh, reviving both the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of religion, characterized by Schaya as the Law of Moses and the Mysteries. These highly exceptional figures also often demonstrate the relativity of exoteric forms in light of their esoteric knowledge, although they are each situated in a particular orthodox tradition and do not contradict the principles or exoteric forms of the Law but manifest the inner meanings thereof through direct Divine inspiration as opposed to imitation. In addition to John and Jesus, Schaya associates a number of Biblical and Quranic prophets, friends of God and the hidden men (*rijāl al-ghayb*) of Islamic esoterism with the Eliatic function, including Khiṣr and the Mahdī.<sup>7</sup> Regarding Khiṣr and the Eliatic function, Leo Shaya states,

The Muslim tradition also has a spiritual function which corresponds to that of Elias, and affirms that it is exercised by two people in particular, each of whom has his own field of activity. We do not mean Elias himself, who is mentioned in the Koran along with Jesus (VI, 85) and also in his battle against the worshippers of Baal (XXXVII, 123-132); firstly, it is al-Khiṣr or al-Khaṣir, the “Green” or “Verdant”, who, in the esoteric tradition of Islam, is invested with the same fundamental characteristics as Elias, or at least with those of his function as spiritual Master, “ever-living” and descending suddenly from a supra-terrestrial world to manifest himself in secret to anyone eager for the Absolute. He is, above all, Master of the

spiritual solitaires, of those elect beings to whom he reveals himself as an ocean of initiating and universal wisdom, an inexhaustible source of enlightenment, a withholder and giver of the “water of life”.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, at the end of this cycle of cosmic existence, a number of these messianic figures and revivers of tradition will openly manifest their initiatic function and authority and disclose the metaphysical knowledge at the heart of the revealed religions among the faithful. While the religions remain distinct, their followers are brought into peace and harmony through the guidance and authority of these figures and the sacred knowledge that they convey, which, among other things, reveals the transcendent and esoteric convergence of the revealed religions. According to Schaya when Elias returns he will also have a heavenly scripture:

The “Book” of Elias is the integral Wisdom of the unanimous Tradition and the eschatological Manifestation of the unique Principle. Elias represents to the Jews the passage from their traditional exclusivism to the universality that they too possess, since they affirm that the Tishbite [Elias] will raise his voice so loud to announce spiritual peace that it will be heard from one end of the world to another; and the Doctors of the Law teach that “the just of all nations have their part in the future life”, and moreover that all “the men, who are not idolaters can be considered as „Israelites.”<sup>9</sup>

While it is not advisable to speculate on the exact point at which this cosmic cycle ends, and those signs that immediately precede it, including the return of the Mahdì and Jesus the Messiah, the religious exclusivism that permeates religious communities can be partially assuaged by coming to terms with these figures’ universal function. Indeed, the traditional sources highlight that these luminaries will not simply save those in one particular religion alone and oppose or

“leave behind” the vast majority of humanity who providentially practice another religion-an idea that often justifies the hostility that some religious groups have towards one another. Rather, those invested with the Eliatic function will restore the original forms of all orthodox religions and unite the faithful under their banner through a revival of metaphysical knowledge (*‘irfān/ma‘rifah*)-the common esoteric teachings at the heart of each religion-and a return to the primordial tradition (*al-dīn al-‘ānīf*) of Adam and Abraham. Foremost among these figures whose reign is expected by Muslims before the second coming of Christ is the Mahdī. Schaya writes,

...As for the other person who reflects Elias in Islam, he is the one who will come at the end to establish what the Judeo-Christian tradition calls the “Glorious Reign of the Messiah,” he is Al-Mahdī, the one “Guided” by God. Shi‘ite Islam identifies him with the Twelfth Imam, living hidden for centuries and due to re-appear to fulfill his eschatological work...<sup>10</sup>

Below we attempt to bring to light the significance of Khiar and the Mahdī in the Islamic sources and the writings of classical and contemporary sages. The Eliatic function in Islam is by no means limited to these two eminent individuals, but they are the chief exemplars of it next to Elias, Enoch (Idris), John, Jesus, the Virgin, and the Prophet of Islam himself, whose esoteric teachings and immediate light and presence continues to guide Muslim seekers. At a time when Islam is more often than not misunderstood and attacked by outsiders and parodied and betrayed by some Muslims, those who manifest the Eliatic function in Islam convey to us the most essential and universal aspects of the religion and call us all to the deepest teachings of the various traditions.

### **Khiar**

The Shādhilī Shaykh Ibn ‘Aḥā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309) writes in his *Laḥā’if al-Minan*, “Know that Khiar’s continued existence [in this world] is a matter of unanimous agreement among the members

of the community, while saints of every age recount having met him and received teaching on his authority.”<sup>11</sup> Along with Elias, Khiḡ drank from the fountain of eternal life gaining direct Divine knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ladunī*) and remains present on earth to guide qualified seekers on the spiritual path and instruct them in the Divine mysteries.<sup>12</sup> He is regarded by Muslims as an enigmatic prophet or friend of God and an *uwaysī* guide who instructs the solitary saints (*afrād*) in dreams and visions and even through brief encounters on earth.<sup>13</sup> Named by tradition Khiḡ or al-Khaḡir, which means the “Green” or “Verdant One” and Mu‘allim al-anbiyā’ or “Teacher of the prophets,” Khiḡ is not mentioned by name in the Quran, but is identified in several sayings of the Prophet as the enigmatic guide of the prophet Moses referred to in *sīrat al-Kahf* as “...a servant among Our servants whom We had granted a mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Our Presence.” (Quran 18:65)<sup>14</sup>

The way to Khidr is indicated to Moses by the disappearance of a fish in his possession at “the junction of the two seas” (*majmā‘ al-baĕrayn*). Khiḡ represents the isthmus or *barzakh* in Arabic that connects and also separates these two bodies of water, the nexus and barrier between esoteric knowledge (*‘ilm al-bāḥin*) and exoteric knowledge (*‘ilm al-ĭāhir*), as well as the Divine and corporeal worlds. The *barzakh* symbolizes the abode of the macrocosmic Pole (*quḥb*) and also our own spiritual center—the heart (*qalb*)-where Heaven and earth meet.<sup>15</sup> Moses’ initial encounter with Khiḡ is related in the Quran as follows:

Moses said unto him, “Shall I follow thee, that thou mightest teach me some of that which thou has been taught of sound judgment?” He said, “Truly thou wilt not be able to bear patiently with me. And how canst thou bear patiently that which thine awareness encompasses not?” He said, “Thou wilt find me patient, if God wills, and I shall not disobey thee in any matter.” He said, “If thou wouldst follow me, then question me not about anything, till I make mention of it to thee.” (18:66-70)

The Quran proceeds by describing three apparently antinomian acts that Khiar performs that draw the objection of Moses. The sage makes a hole in a vessel that had carried the two, then he kills a young man, and finally he rebuilds a wall in a town that had been inhospitable to them. Each time Moses breaks his oath of silence and objects to the actions of Khiar on the basis of his knowledge of the Law. We read in the Quran:

He said, "This is the parting between thee and me. I shall inform thee of the meaning of that which thou couldst not bear patiently: As for the ship, it belonged to indigent people who worked the sea. I desired to damage it, for behind them was a king who was seizing every ship by force. And as for the young boy, his parents were believers and we feared that he would make them suffer much through rebellion and disbelief. So we desired that their Lord give them in exchange one who is better than him in purity, and nearer to mercy. And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and beneath it was a treasure belonging to them. Their father was righteous, and thy Lord desired that they should reach their maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from thy Lord. And I did not do this upon my own command. This is the meaning of that which thou couldst not bear patiently."  
(78-82)

Here Moses accentuates the exoteric dimension of religion, horizontal knowledge, and the Mosaic Law in Judaism and the *Shari'ah* in Islam, while Khiar represents esoterism, vertical knowledge, and the Eliatic function, as well as the Kabbalah in Judaism and Sufism in Islam. The Quranic account demonstrates the relativity of outward or exoteric forms in light of direct Divine inspiration and guidance that unveils the hidden and underlying meaning of forms from the world of the unseen (*'alam al-ghayb*), to

which only the elect among the friends of God have access. Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aḥḥār (d. 1220) remarks,

There are things on the path that do not appear to square with the externals of the religious law...And thus too when Khiṛ killed the young boy...But anyone who has not reached this rank and sets foot here is an atheist and heretic unless he follows the dictates of religious law.<sup>16</sup>

There are certain sages and servants of God whose actions and purpose cannot be easily understood by the outward dimension of the Law alone and who accentuate and exemplify the quintessential dimensions of religion in their lives and teachings, although as the story of Moses and Khiṛ demonstrates the latter’s actions were in accord with the Divine command, the principles of the Law, and ultimately worked towards the greater good.<sup>17</sup>

The Quran and *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam ultimately bring the Law of Moses and the Way of Khiṛ into an equilibrium and symbiosis for Muslims, which is the straight or middle path (*al-ḡirāḥ al-mustaḡim*) that also became normative for orthodox Sufis.<sup>18</sup> The *Shari‘ah* is a path to salvation and a necessary source of protection and grace (*barakah*) for those on the spiritual path (*ḥariqah*). Islamic esoterism or Sufism (*tagawwuf*) can be described as the spiritual path to the Truth (*al-Ēaqq*) to be followed in this life on the basis of the practice of the *Shari‘ah*, along with the attainment of metaphysical knowledge (*ma‘rifah*), which also reveals the true meaning of forms in this world. Avoiding extremes, one should not deny on the one hand the significance of the Sacred Law or on the other hand think that Islam can be reduced to the exoteric dimensions of religion alone. Muslims who inherit the fullness of the Quranic and Prophetic teaching, to the extent possible, integrate within themselves knowledge of both the Law and the Way. In Mu‘yī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 1240) chapter on Moses in his *Fuḡīḡ al-ĕikam*, Khiṛ in fact tells Moses before they part ways, “I have knowledge God hath taught me and which ye know not, and thou hast knowledge God hath

taught thee, which I know not.”<sup>19</sup> As recipients of this most fascinating exchange and dialectic through the Divine Word, Muslims-jurists and aspirants on the Sufi path alike-can reflect upon a sacred historical and trans-historical prophetic encounter that providentially unites them and helps to explain the nature of their differences.<sup>20</sup>

It is said that Khiṣr was also present at the Prophet of Islam’s funeral in 632 and recognized by Abī Bakr al-Ġiddīq (d. 634) and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ḥālib (d. 661):

A powerful-looking, fine-featured, handsome man with a white beard came leaping over the backs of the people till he reached where the sacred body... lay. Weeping bitterly, he turned toward the Companions and paid his condolences. Abī Bakr and ‘Alī said that he was Khiṣr.<sup>21</sup>

Tradition states that he joins Elias in the holy city of Jerusalem every year during the month of Ramadan. Shī‘ites believe that Khiṣr accompanied the Twelfth Imam to the outskirts of the city of Qom in 964 to instruct Shaykh Ēasan ibn Muthlih to build a mosque known as Masjīd Jamkarān.<sup>22</sup> Encounters with Khiṣr are also replete throughout the history of Sufism, who, both perplexing and illuminating, descends upon seekers and wayfarers like a Zen koan incarnate. In Islamic hagiographies and other classical Sufī literature Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. 790), Sahl Tustarī (d. 896), Ēakīm Tirmidhī (d. 932), Rīzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209), Mu‘yī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī, and Abī’l-Ēasan Shādhilī (d. 1258) all meet and are instructed by the solitary guide.<sup>23</sup> The Sufī saint Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, whose life resembles that of the Buddha, appears in Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aḥḥār’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’* as the king of Balkh immersed in a life of luxury and opulence. A visitor appears in Ibrāhīm’s court searching for a camel on the roof. ‘Aḥḥār relates the words of Ibrāhīm: “You ignorant man, why are you looking for a camel on the roof? What would a camel be doing on the roof?” To which the visitor replies, “You heedless man, are you looking for

the Lord while you sit on a golden throne and wear satin clothes?”<sup>24</sup>  
Then the visitor approaches the king’s throne:

Ibrâhîm said, “What do you want?” “I’m stopping over at this inn,” the man said. “This is no inn. This is my palace.” “Who did this palace belong to before this?” “It belonged to my father,” “Who did it belong to before him?” “It belonged to somebody or other.” “Who did it belong to before him?” “It belonged to his father.” “Where have they all gone?” “They have all died.” “But isn’t an inn a place where people come and go?” He said this and quickly left the palace. Ibrâhîm went running after him shouting, “Stop, so I can have a word with you!” The man stopped, “Who are you?” Ibrâhîm asked. “Where do you come from? You have kindled a fire in my soul.” “I am a land and a sea, an earth and a sky. I am best known as Khiṛ.”<sup>25</sup>

Khiṛ’s words imparted on Ibrâhîm the fear of God and a yearning for spiritual guidance. Ibrâhîm then tells the Green One, “‘Wait here, while I go home and come back.’ ‘The matter is more pressing than that,’ [Khiṛ] said and disappeared.”<sup>26</sup> Ibrâhîm embraces a life of spiritual poverty (*faqr*), turns to God in repentance, and eventually meets Khiṛ again. In ‘Alî Hujwîrî’s (d. 1070) *Kashf al-ma’jîb*, Ibrâhîm states, “During that time Khiṛ consorted with me and taught me the Great Name of God. Then my heart became wholly empty of ‘other’ [than God and His Name].”<sup>27</sup>

According to the Sufî metaphysician Muëyî al-Dîn ibn ‘Arabî, along with the Pole (*quḥb*), Enoch, Jesus, and Elias, Khiṛ is one of the four spiritual pillars (*awtâd*) who remain perpetually alive at the head of the celestial hierarchy of the Sufis.<sup>28</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz states,

Even though it is generally held in Islam that the four people mentioned by Ibn ‘Arabî belong forever to the world of the living (two of them [Enoch] and Jesus,

dwell in the celestial spheres, and the other two, Elias and Khaṣir, dwell on this earth unseen by most mortals), this is the first time that they have been assigned the supreme offices in the esoteric hierarchy.<sup>29</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabī also met the enigmatic Khiṣr several times and received the *khirqah khaṣiriyyah* or the initiatic mantle of Khiṣr in 1196 in Seville and in 1205 in Mosul.<sup>30</sup> On one occasion Khiṣr tells the Shaykh al-akbar to submit to his master, Abī’l-‘Abbās al-‘Uryabī, regarding a particular matter upon which they disagreed.<sup>31</sup> Henry Corbin relates that Khiṣr came to Ibn ‘Arabī without revealing his identity and said:

“O Muhammad [Ibn ‘Arabī]! Trust your master.”...The young man retraced his steps, meaning to inform his master that he had changed his mind, but upon seeing him [Abī’l-‘Abbās] stopped him with these words: “Must Khiṣr appear to you before you trust your master’s words?”<sup>32</sup>

Khiṣr appears to the Shaykh al-akbar to stress the importance of his own master’s guidance. Similarly, the esoteric rites and practices of Sufism are also a method of gaining the same Divine knowledge that God imparted to Khiṣr. Ibn ‘Arabī relates in the introduction to his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*,

...if the properly prepared person persists in *dhikr* (‘remembering’ God) and spiritual retreat, emptying the place (of the heart) from thinking, and sitting like a poor beggar who has nothing at the doorstep of their Lord—then God will bestow upon them and give them some of that knowing of Him, of those divine secrets and supernal understandings, which He granted to his servant Khiṣr.<sup>33</sup>

*Dhikr Allāh* or the remembrance or invocation of God and His Names is the central practice in Sufism and communicates the knowledge and presence of the One who is invoked. *Dhikr* is not only the repetition of the most beautiful Names of God (*asmā' al-ḥusnā*), but the immediate recollection and awareness of these realities and ultimately Reality as such in the heart of the invoker.

In a manner similar to Khiḡar, Jalāl al-Dīn Rīmī (d. 1273) also explains the meaning (*ma'nā*) behind every form (*ḡīrat*) through an encompassing vision of reality that was unlocked by his beloved friend Shams al-dīn Tabrīzī (d. 1248), who Rīmī's son Sulḡān Valad (d. 1312) compares to Khiḡar.<sup>34</sup> The Green One also appears in Rīmī's *Mathnawī* (d. 1273):

One night a certain man was crying "Allah!" till his lips were growing sweet with praise of Him.

The Devil said, "Prithee, O garrulous one, where is the (response) 'Here am I' to all this 'Allah'?"

Not a single response is coming from the Throne: how long will you cry 'Allah' with grim face?"

He became broken-hearted and laid down his head (to sleep): in a dream he saw Khiḡar amidst the verdure.

He (Khiḡar) said, "Hark, you have held back from praising God: how is it that you repent of having called unto Him?"

He said, "No 'Here am I' is coming to me in response, hence I fear that I may be (a reprobate who is) driven away from the Door."

He (Khiḡar) said, "(God saith), That 'Allah' of thine is My 'Here am I,' and the supplication and grief and ardour of thine is My messenger (to thee).

Thy shifts and attempts to find a means (of gaining access to Me) were (in reality) My drawing (thee towards Me), and released they feet (from the bonds of worldliness).

Thy fear and love are the noose to catch My favor:  
beneath every ‘O Lord’ (of thine) is many a ‘Here am  
I’ (from Me)...”<sup>35</sup>

Here Khiṣr serves to remind the reader that prayer itself is a Divine response to man, an *oratio infusa* or Divine Act within the heart of man that in reality proceeds from above. In a prayer for his companion Ēusām al-Dīn Çelebī (d. 1284), Rīmī states in his *Mathnawī*, “May thy life in the world be like (that of) Khiṣr, soul-increasing and help-giving and perpetual! Like Khiṣr and Elias, mayst thou remain in the world (forever), that by thy grace earth may become heaven!”<sup>36</sup>

Many of the disciples of Khiṣr also have a regular guide and *silsilah* or initiatic chain that goes back to the Prophet of Islam. Such was also the case for a contemporary Sufi sage Frithjof Schuon or ‘pså Nīr al-Dīn Aĕmad (d. 1998), who is well known for his writings on Islamic esoterism and the *sophia perennis* or the perennial philosophy, and who seems to have inspired Leo Schaya’s essay and designation, “The Eliatic Function.” Schuon’s primary initiatic line goes through the Algerian Shādhilī master, Aĕmad al-‘Alawī (d. 1934), but he also alludes to encounters with the *rijāl al-ghayb*, including Khiṣr and the Virgin Mary (Maryam al-Batīl).<sup>37</sup> Schuon encounters a man thought to be Khiṣr in Mostaghanem and Oran in 1933. Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude relate this first meeting, which took place at the *zāwiyah* of Shaykh Aĕmad al-‘Alawī in Mostaghanem:

...The blue-black look in his eyes seemed to transfix him and he suddenly seized Schuon’s hand, holding it in the way it is held for the initiation rite, and enjoining him to repeat after him three times in Arab the Quranic formula, “Lead us on the straight path.” Then he added a few words and said in French, “You I have known you for a long time. Good-bye and thank you.”<sup>38</sup>

Later in Oran Schuon meets Khiṣr again:

...The man took [Schuon's] hand, and he again felt the flow of an unusual power. His way of reciting the rosary, alternating a loud voice with a soft voice, was uncommon, yet, next to him, Schuon felt "overwhelmed with confidence." Turning to him, the man said, "For he who is alone with God, men no longer count, he has no need of them. He is close to God everywhere, his homeland is nowhere and everywhere."<sup>39</sup>

In their own way Schuon's life and writings reflect the Eliatic function. Schuon embraced Islam and received a regular Sufi initiation in 1932 that connected him to the grace of the Prophet Muḩammad, and saw in the Islamic tradition and other religions their most universal and esoteric teachings. His famous treatise *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* and many other books such as *Esoterism as Principle and as Way* and *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* demonstrate the relativity of outward religious forms as well as their necessity. Schuon emphasizes esoterism and gnosis, which is comparable to the knowledge that God imparted to Khiṛ (al-'ilm al-ladunī). However, Schuon was not an antinomian mystic, but combined in his person and teachings an emphasis on orthodoxy and esoterism, which can be likened to the Law of Moses and the Way of Khiṛ, the Quran and the Prophet of Islam's straight path (al-ġirāḩ al-mustaqīm).<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to Leo Schaya written in 1973-which predates the publication of Schaya's "The Eliatic Function" (1979)<sup>41</sup>-Schuon sheds light on the archetype and spiritual function of Khiṛ:

Al-Khiṛ is really the Holy Spirit; in this sense he is Mary's spouse; he is also the human form of Metatron, and the Intellect that lives within us is his microcosmic manifestation. Elias is a historical manifestation-but also suprahistoric-of this principle.<sup>42</sup>

Here the *uwaysī* guide reflects and reveals our own Intellect—the “Khiṣr” or “Imam of your being” to use the language of Shī‘ite *‘irfān*—the inner faculty of perception or eye of the heart (*‘ayn al-qalb*) through which man sees and encounters God directly.<sup>43</sup> In a manner similar to the Angel Gabriel, the Prophet of Islam and the founders of the great religions, Khiṣr is a manifestation of the Universal Spirit (*al-rīḥ*) who helps us recall our own primordial nature and spirit that receives knowledge and guidance from God directly. Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes that man must,

...Seek the fountain of life, led in this quest by the figure whom Islamic esoterism call Khiṣr, the guide upon the spiritual path, the representative and symbol of the Eliatic function which cannot but be always present. Having drunk of the water of immortality, which is also the elixir of Divine knowledge, man regains his original consciousness and primordial abode. His wandering ceases and he arrives after his long cosmic journey at that from which his true self never departed.<sup>44</sup>

The disciples of Khiṣr become transfigured and consequently reflect his function and guidance, in varying degrees, in their own lives and work. However, one cannot choose Khiṣr or other *uwaysī* masters as a guide, but they can in fact appear to those who are chosen and in need of guidance. If available, circumventing the regular channels of guidance and initiation offered by Heaven through the Sufi orders or other orthodox esoteric paths in hope of encountering Elias, Khiṣr or the Mahdī simply indicates an unwillingness on the part of the “seeker” to submit to esoteric guidance, and would in any case also make them unqualified for *uwaysī* guidance.<sup>45</sup> For the teachings of the authentic living Sufi masters are in complete harmony and accord with those of a Khidr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes,

This story [Quran 18:60-85] is the prototype of the function of the spiritual master to instruct disciples and

to reveal to them when they are ripe for the understanding of the inner significance of things. In Sufi literature, in fact, the spiritual master, who is usually called *shaykh*, *pîr* (both meaning elder), *murshid* (the guide), and *murâd* (the person sought by the will of the disciple), is also called the Khiqar of the spiritual path (*khiqar-i râh* in Persian).<sup>46</sup>

One should not wait for an encounter with the *rijâl al-ghayb* to gain metaphysical knowledge. The Divine Reality remains accessible through the revealed religions and the esoteric paths contained therein. The teachings and mysteries that Elias, Khiqar, the Mahdî and other Eliatic figures convey are accessible through authentic spiritual guides here on earth, who direct serious seekers towards inner and outer equilibrium and a vertical ascension to the One.

### **The Mahdî**

Sunnis and Shî'ites alike both expect the coming of a descendent of the Prophet Muĕammad who will restore peace and justice on earth and directly precede the second coming of the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary.<sup>47</sup> Traditions concerning this figure are recorded in the books of *Ēadith*, although the two main orthodox branches of Islam do not agree on the exact identity of the Mahdî. Most Sunnis believe that the prophesied Mahdî, which means "the Guide" or "the Rightly-Guided One," has not been born, while Ithnâ 'asharî or Twelver Shî'ites, believe that the Twelfth Imam is the expected Mahdî foretold by the Prophet of Islam. Despite their points of divergence we believe that both Sunni and Shî'ite sources shed important light on the identity and function of this person.

In the Sunni books of *Ēadith* a number of companions narrate sayings of the Prophet of Islam concerning the Mahdî, including 'Umar ibn al-Khaĥĥâb (d. 644), 'Abd al-Raĕmân ibn 'Awf (d. 652), 'Uthmân ibn 'Affân (d. 656), Ĥalĕah ibn 'Ubayd Allâh (d. 656), Alî ibn Abî Ĥâlîb (d. 661), Umm Salamah bint Abî Umayyah (d. 680), Abî Hurayrah 'Abd al-Raĕmân (d. 681), and Anas ibn Mâlik (d.

709).<sup>48</sup> It is recorded in the *Kitâb al-Mahdî* in *Sunan Abî Dâ'îd*, that the Prophet of Islam said,

The Mahdî will be of my stock and he will be broad of forehead and aquiline of nose. He will fill the earth with right and with justice even as it hath been filled with wrong and oppression. Seven years will he reign.<sup>49</sup>

If only one day of this time remained [in this world], God would raise up a man from my family who would fill this earth with justice as it has been filled with oppression.<sup>50</sup>

The Mahdî will be of my family, of the descendents of Fâhimah.<sup>51</sup>

As noted above the exact identity of the Mahdî is unclear from Sunni sources. The majority of the community does however agree on his eventual appearance and general function. In a tradition of the Prophet recorded in Shî'ite sources we read:

Al-Mahdî is from my progeny. His name is similar to mine and his epithet is similar to mine. In his physique and character he looks exactly like me. He will be in a state of occultation and there will be confusion in which people will wander about. Then he will come forth like a sharp, shooting star to fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled before with injustice and inequity.<sup>52</sup>

In Ithnâ 'asharî Shî'ism, the Twelfth Imam (868-present)-the son of the Eleventh Imâm Ēasan al-'Askarî (d. 872) and a Byzantine princess Narjis-is the Mahdî and the Imam al-Zamân or "Imam of the Age." The Twelfth Imam went into the lesser occultation (*al-ghaybat al-ghuĥrâ*) in the year 872 and was represented by four deputies (*abwâb*)

during that period.<sup>53</sup> At the time of the death of the last of these deputies in 939 the Imam entered what is known as the greater occultation (*al-ghaybat al-kubrā*) in Medina or Sāmarrā', and ascended from earth to the world or the unseen (*'ālam al-ghayb*), where he remains miraculously alive until the present and occasionally reappears to the faithful in dreams, visions, and even in the flesh.<sup>54</sup> His continuous presence and function in Shī'ism is analogous to the Pole or *quḥb* in Sufism, to whom can be applied the saying, "The earth shall never be empty of the witness of God (*ʿujjat Allāh*)."<sup>55</sup> "The Hidden Imam's occultation is indicative of the Supreme Center being concealed during the Kali Yuga."<sup>56</sup> Henry Corbin writes,

For [Twelver] Shī'ites, the Imam of our period, the *twelfth Imam* is in occultation (*ghaybah*), having been raised from his world as Enoch and Elias were ravished... In his absence, no simple officiants assume this role, but persons who have been put to the test and are known for their high spiritual quality; they are not appointed like functionaries, but are gradually recognized and promoted by the community.<sup>57</sup>

After a series of cosmological signs, the Hidden Imam will return to restore peace and justice on earth for a number of years, which will manifest through his sacerdotal and royal initiatic function. First and foremost, the Imam revives the doctrine of Unity (*al-tawḥīd*) through a restoration of the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of the Islamic tradition, including gnosis (*ma'rifah/irfān*), wisdom (*ʿikmah*), esoteric scriptural exegesis (*ta'wīl*),<sup>58</sup> a direct interpretation of Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*), and a just and peaceful social order that extends to Muslims and people of all faiths under his domain. According to Sa'd al-Dīn Ēamīyah (d. 1252), "The Hidden Imām will not appear before the time when people are able to understand, even from the very thongs of his sandals, the secrets of *tawḥīd*'-that is to say, the esoteric meaning of Divine Unity."<sup>59</sup> His outward reappearance will correspond to and catalyze an awakening of hearts among the faithful,

the faculty of discernment capable of knowing the Absolute and Infinite Reality and its essential attributes: truth, goodness and beauty. In his treatise *al-Insân al-Kâmil*, ‘Abd al-Karîm Jîlî writes,

By ‘those who have realized the Essence’ (*al-dhâtiyyîn*), one means the men in whom lives the Divine Subtle Reality, in the sense where we were saying that God, when He reveals Himself to His servant and He extinguishes the individuality, establishes in him a Divine Subtle Reality which may be of the nature of the Essence or of the nature of the Divine Qualities. When it is of the nature of the Essence, the human constitution (*haykal*) (where it lives) will be the Unique Perfect Being, the Universal Support, the pole around which existence turns...Through him God safeguards the world. He is the Mahdî, the Seal of the Sainthood and the representative (*al-khalifah*) of God on earth...He influences the realities of existence like the magnet draws iron. He tames the world by his grandeur, and by his power he does that which he wishes...<sup>60</sup>

Like the Prophet of Islam before him, the Mahdî’s will, actions, qualities and very existence are extinguished in and subsist through God’s Will, Actions, Qualities, and the Divine Essence or Self (*al-Dhât*). He conveys to humanity the supreme metaphysical knowledge of both Unity and Union. While the Mahdî acts according to the inner and outer meanings of the Quran and *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam, he also derives his knowledge directly from God. Imam Ja‘far al-Çâdiq (d. 757) states,

When the [Mahdî] of the family of Muëammad, may God bless him and his family, comes he will judge among the people with the judgment of David, peace be upon him. Through the inspiration of God, the Exalted, he will not need evidence. He will judge

through his knowledge and he will inform each people about what is their innermost secret. He will know his friend from his enemy by a process of immediate recognition...<sup>61</sup>

The Imam al-Mahdī will return and reestablish peace and justice on earth through the sword, understood as worldly power and as a symbol for spiritual warfare, the *jihād al-akbar* or greater struggle against the lower self that reigns supreme over most men in our age.<sup>62</sup> Just as Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Ḥālib inaugurated the cycle *futuwwah* (spiritual chivalry) in Islam, the Mahdī is the Seal of *futuwwah* (*khātam al-futuwwah*).<sup>63</sup> With his companions, he will fight oppression and tyranny and establish peace, justice, virtue and order, both macrocosmically and in the inner beings of the faithful. Imam al-Ġādiq states, “After receiving permission [to manifest himself], the [Hidden] Imam will pronounce the Hebrew name of God; then his companions, 313 in all, will gather around him in Mecca, in the same way that small clouds come together in autumn.”<sup>64</sup> It is fascinating to note the Mahdī’s invocation of the Hebrew name of God, presumably the tetragrammaton YHVH as it is written without vocalization in the Jewish tradition, the invocation of which is not permissible in Judaism until the coming of the messianic age.<sup>65</sup>

According to Mu‘yī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī, the ministers of the Mahdī followed by the multitudes of believers will pledge allegiance to the Imam in the same way that the family and companions of the Prophet of Islam swore an oath of allegiance to him at Ēudaybiyyah.<sup>66</sup> In his *An Ocean Without Shore* Michel Chodkiewicz has demonstrated that chapter 366 of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* on the ministers of the Mahdī and their pact with him (*mubāya‘at al-quḥb*) directly corresponds to *sīrat al-Fatḥ* or chapter 48 in the Quran where the pact at Ēudaybiyyah is discussed and God tells the Prophet and the believers, “Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee [Muḥammad], pledge allegiance only unto God. The Hand of God is over their hands...” (48:10)<sup>67</sup>

With his companions, the Imam will then wage battles to confront tyranny, oppression, and false messiahs, and redress historical and

current grievances and injustices. According to one tradition attributed to Imām al-Ġādiq, “When [the Mahdī] rises he will deal with the Arabs and Quraysh only by the sword.”<sup>68</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) also states in his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*:

[The Mahdī] will manifest religion as it [really] is in itself, the religion by which the Messenger of God would judge and rule if he were there. He will eliminate the different schools of [religious law] so that only the pure religion (Quran 39:3) remains, and his enemies will be those who follow blindly the ‘*ulamā*’, the people of *ijtihād*, because they will see the Mahdī judging differently from the way followed by their imams [i.e., the historical founders of the schools of Islamic law]. So they will only accept the Mahdī’s authority grudgingly and against their will, because of their fear of his sword and his strength, and because they covet [the power and wealth] that he possesses. But the common people of the Muslims and the greater part of the elite among them will rejoice in him, while the true knowers of God among the People of [spiritual] Realities will pledge allegiance to him because of God’s directly informing them [of the Mahdī’s true nature and mission], through [inner] unveiling and immediate witnessing.<sup>69</sup>

While the Mahdī’s mission will be fulfilled through outward and inward battles that reestablish justice and order in this world, his being and function are also embodiments of Divine Hope, Light, and Mercy.<sup>70</sup> The Mahdī’s mission will be marked by the manifestation of Mercy, which is an essential Quality of God and the Prophet Muḥammad, who according to the Quran is “...a mercy unto the worlds.” (21:107) Ibn ‘Arabī writes,

...For if a human being gets angry of his own accord, his anger does not contain mercy in any respect; but if

he becomes angry for God's sake [i.e., in fulfilling the divine commandments], then his anger is God's Anger and God's Anger is never free from being mixed with Divine Mercy...Because (God's) Mercy, since it preceded [His] Anger, entirely covers all engendered being and extends to every thing (Quran 7:156)...Therefore this Mahdî does not become angry except for God's sake, so that his anger does not go beyond [what is required in] upholding God's limits that He has prescribed; this is just the opposite of the [ordinary] person who becomes angry because of his own desires for [something happening] contrary to his own personal aims. And likewise the person who becomes angry [only] for God's sake can only be just and equitable, not tyrannical and unjust."<sup>71</sup>

The Mahdî-who embodies the virtues of the Prophet, such as humility, magnanimity, and truthfulness-is a theophany of Divine Guidance and Mercy, a benevolent leader to the faithful and a guide for serious seekers. As the *insân al-kâmil* or Universal Man he will naturally reflect and bring into equilibrium the Divine Qualities of Mercy and Rigor here on earth. While he will be an insurmountable warrior and a just ruler, it must be remembered that mercy always takes precedence among the true *awliyâ' al-Raĕmân*, or "friends of the Merciful" as they are known by tradition.

In a very important saying attributed to Imam Muĕammad al-Bâqir we read,

...He was named the Mahdî [the Guided One] as he will be guided to a hidden [*khafî*] matter: he will recover the Torah and other Books of God from a cave...then will he judge between the people of the Torah by the Torah, between the people of the Gospel by the Gospel...and between the people of the Quran [lit. *al-Furqân*] by the Quran...<sup>72</sup>

Here the cave symbolizes the initiatic center and esoteric knowledge that is mostly hidden from humanity during the occultation of the Imam.<sup>73</sup> When the Mahdi rises and emerges from his concealment he reveals the diversity and inner unity of the revealed religions to humanity. In the traditional accounts we see the concrete restoration of the revealed religions for the various orthodox religious communities and the Divinely mandated unveiling of their essential or esoteric unity. The Mahdi's Eliatic function makes humanity aware that these diverse religious paths lead to the same summit, where we find the transcendent unity of religions. Knowledge of this esoteric and transcendent unity will in fact lead to-through the wisdom and reign of the Mahdi and Jesus-eventual peace and harmony among the various religious communities. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr,

According to Islam when the Mahdi appears before the end of time, not only will he reestablish peace but he will also uplift the outward religious forms to unveil their inner meaning and their essential unity through which he will then unify all religions. Similar accounts are to be found in other traditions such as Hinduism where the eschatological events at the end of the historical cycle are also related to the unification of various religious forms.<sup>74</sup>

The Imam affirms and restores, in addition to Islam, all of the revealed religions for the various communities under his dominion. While primarily guiding the Muslim community, the Mahdi does not simply universally implement the Islamic tradition, but also revives Judaism, Christianity and even the religions of the East. Through his wisdom and the Divine command he calls the faithful of all revealed religions to live according to their scriptures and traditions and demonstrates their essential and transcendent unity. By restoring and unveiling the inner content of the revealed religions, the Mahdi orients each religious community to its common Source and prepares the ground for the complete revival of the primordial tradition (*al-din al-*

*ġaniḥ*) during the second coming of Jesus the Messiah, the new Adam.<sup>75</sup>

Through the spiritual and intellectual awakening of mankind, the Mahdī also makes the signs of God upon the horizons and within ourselves transparent phenomena revealing their archetypes, which are none other than the Divine Names and Attributes.<sup>76</sup> Imam al-Ġādiq states: “[the companions of the Mahdī] are like sun worshippers and moon worshippers.”<sup>77</sup> These two great celestial symbols can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. Suffice it to say the signs of God on earth and upon the horizons will be read and understood by the Mahdī and his followers and catalyze a recollection of their metaphysical archetypes and microcosmic analogies.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the overemphasis on the transcendence of God has created an insurmountable barrier between God and His creation in the minds of some exoterists.<sup>79</sup> The Mahdī will affirm both the transcendence and the immanence of the Divine Reality, restoring Islam (submission to God) and the primordial tradition. Virgin nature will again be revered as a sacred book revealing the *vestigia Dei* or *āyāt Allāh* through an initiatic awakening of the Intellect (*al-‘aql*) or the eye of the heart (*‘ayn al-qalb*) of men and women. The Mahdī’s spiritual revival of man and his spiritual faculties and modes of living and being could not but have a restorative impact on the natural world and the environmental crisis that we are facing.

The Mahdī’s return will precede the second coming of Jesus the Messiah, these two events being the two great signs before the Day of Judgment.<sup>80</sup> Concerning Jesus or Sayyidnā ‘psā, the Prophet of Islam stated: “...God, the Exalted, will raise the Messiah, son of Mary, who will arrive close to the white minaret in the East of Damascus...He will pursue the Anti-Christ (al-Dajjāl) and will encounter him at the gate of Lud and will slaughter him...”<sup>81</sup> Eventually, the Mahdī will be accompanied by Jesus, whom the Mahdī will lead in prayer in the Masjid al-Aqḡā in Jerusalem.<sup>82</sup> Following ‘Abd al-Karīm Jilī (d. 1424) William Chittick sheds light on the inner significance of the Mahdī and Jesus, “The conflict between al-Dajjāl and Jesus refers to the battle between the ego and the Spirit, while the appearance of the Mahdī alludes to man’s becoming ‘the Possessor of Equilibrium at the

pinnacle of every perfection.”<sup>83</sup> Jesus, the Spirit of God (*rĩž Allāh*), must conquer the lower self (*nafs*). While the rebellious soul personified by the Anti-Christ is in perpetual conflict with the Spirit, the soul that has surrendered to God can be integrated into the Kingdom of Heaven within man through the guidance of the Spirit or the Intellect-the Imam of our being.<sup>84</sup>

Not only are there future helpers of the Mahdi, but the past and present friends of God are said to be in communion with him throughout his occultation. Seyyed Hossein Nasr remarks,

In speaking of the Sufi master in the Persian context one must remember the role of the Twelfth Imam, who is the Hidden Imam, both in Shi‘ism and in Sufism as it exists in the Shi‘ite world. Inasmuch as the Imam, although in concealment, is alive and is the spiritual axis of the world, he is the Pole (*quĥb*) with whom all Sufi masters are inwardly connected. He is to Shi‘ism what the supreme pole is to Sufism in its Sunni context. In Shi‘ism the Imams, especially ‘Alī, the first, and the Mahdi, the last, are the spiritual guides *par excellence*. The Hidden Imam, representing the whole chain of Imams, is the pole that attracts the hearts of the believers and it is to him that men turn for guidance.<sup>85</sup>

In a manner similar to Elias, the Hidden Imam plays not only an important function at the end of this cycle of human existence, but can also reveal himself to the elect among the faithful during his occultation. Nasr also writes, “The Twelfth Imam is also the secret master of this world and can appear to those who are in the appropriate spiritual state to see him...”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Muslims who are searching for esoteric knowledge and guidance from the Imam al-Mahdi or Khiar should look to the authentic Sufi *shuyĥh* and Shi‘ite ‘*urafā*’ or gnostics who also reflect the light of the Prophet (*al-nĩr al-muĕammadiyyah*) and the Pole (*quĥb*) in their lives and teachings.<sup>87</sup>

While the Islamic sources provide us with abundant knowledge concerning the esoteric and Eliatic function of Khiar and the Mahdi,

reminding Muslims of their shared heritage and destiny with their Jewish and Christian neighbors and believers from other traditions, the function of the Universal Savior to appear before the end of the Kali Yuga-known alternatively as the expected Messiah in Judaism, Jesus in Christianity and Islam, the Kalki Avatar, Maitreya Buddha, and by other designations-also remains largely marginalized by exclusivist Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others who often believe that the Messiah will promote an exclusivist interpretation of their religion alone and overwhelm or destroy all others.<sup>88</sup> By reflecting upon our sacred scriptures and traditional sources and realizing that there is only One Divine Reality who sent many prophets to establish the diverse revealed religions and will send the Mahdî and the Messiah to unite humanity during the messianic era, we can begin to acknowledge our shared heritage and destiny and perhaps live together-in the here and now-in greater peace and accord.

Moreover, the Eliatic function in Islam is not limited to the figures mentioned in this paper alone, but also manifests through the authentic living spiritual guides among the Sufis and gnostics, as well as the writings of those Muslim sages who have emphasized the universality of Islam throughout history, including Mangîr Ēallâj, Shihâb al-Dîn Suhrawardî, Farîd al-Dîn ‘Aĥĥâr, Jalâl al-Dîn Rîmî, and Muĕyî al-Dîn ibn ‘Arabî. In this regard, the works of René Guénon (‘Abd al-Wâhid Yaĕyâ), Frithjof Schuon (‘psâ Nîr al-Dîn Aĕmad), Leo Schaya (‘Abd al-Quddîs), Titus Burckhardt (Ibrâhîm ‘Izz al-Dîn), Martin Lings (Abî Bakr Sirâj al-Dîn), and Seyyed Hossein Nasr are preeminent among Muslim scholars in the contemporary period and a saving barque for serious seekers because they emphasize the quintessential dimensions of religion, the transcendent unity of religions, and the need to practice one orthodox religion that God has revealed to humanity. In a symbolic sense, these Muslim sages inherited the “gift of tongues” and are therefore conversant in the various esoterisms that Heaven has given man access to, revealing the significance of Jewish, Christian and Islamic esoterism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and the Indigenous traditions, and demonstrating their essential unity or the primordial “one language.” One can conclude with these words of Leo Schaya:

The true “Eliatic flow” will grow stronger, according to the Scriptures, as the world’s darkness grows deeper, until the final moment. Then, “...your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of YHYH come. And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of YHVH shall be saved.” (Joel 2: 28-31)<sup>89</sup>

## Notes

1. I wish to express my gratitude to Seyyed Hossein Nasr for providing many helpful comments and corrections on the content of this paper, without which I could not have done justice to this topic. I also wish to thank Joseph Lombard, Kareem Monib and Adam Vogtman for their assistance. This article is also planned for publication in the journal *Sacred Web*, Issue 25, Summer 2010.
2. In this instance, the Quran refers to Elijah/Elias (ʿIlyās) in the plural form ʿIlyāsīn, which literally means “Elijahs” or “Eliases” and suggests to most commentators an association of Elias with his immediate community of believers. However, it seems plausible to us to extend the usage of ʿIlyāsīn to include all prophets who accentuate the esoteric dimension of religion, such as Khiṣr, as well as the Mahdī, and other friends of God who fulfill the “Eliatic function” as described below. The Quranic translations throughout this essay, unless otherwise noted, are from *HarperCollins Study Qurʾān*, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (San Francisco: HarperOne, forthcoming 2012).
3. Leo Schaya, “The Eliatic Functon,” *Studies in Comparative Religion* vol. 13 no. 1 and 2 (Middlesex, England: Perennial Books Ltd., 1979), pp. 31-40. This article was also published in a slightly revised form as “The Mission of Elias,” *Studies in Comparative Religion* vol. 14 no. 3 and 4 (Middlesex, England: Perennial Books Ltd., 1980), pp. 159-167.
4. For the sake of continuity we will use Elias for all further references to Elijah/Elias.
5. “The Eliatic Function,” p. 32.
6. *The Holy Bible*, King James version. Frithjof Schuon states, “‘Elias is come,’ said Christ, thinking of Saint John the Baptist, even though John had denied he

was Elias; it is true that Christ was referring only to the function and not the person whereas the Forerunner was speaking of his own person and not the function; but Jesus' indirect and elliptical expression nonetheless illustrates the liberty that prophetic language may take with the facts when a principal truth is at stake." *Christianity/Islam; Perspective in Esoteric Ecumenism* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008) p. 132. See also, "The Eliatic Function," pp. 35-36.

7. Seyyed Hossein Nasr states, "...The word *rijâl* carries a masculine gender, but lest one think it refers simply to the male gender, it is important to recount the famous Sufi tradition according to which on the Day of Judgment when all human beings are standing before God, He will say, 'The *rijâl* [in the spiritual sense] step forward.' And the first person to step forward will be the Virgin Mary." *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), p. 24. For more on the *rijâl al-ghayb* see William Chittick's chapter "The Unseen Men," in his *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: the Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), pp. 75-108.
8. "The Eliatic Function," p. 36.
9. "The Eliatic Function," p. 38. Schaya notes elsewhere, "This 'exclusivism', which denies the other religions and could not have any valid reason other than the protection of Israel's traditional form, was ruptured from time to time, even on the exoteric plane of Judaism, by 'universalist' affirmations on the part of certain of its great representatives, such as Saadya (tenth century), Maimonides (twelfth century), or Yehudah Halevy; on this subject one need only quote the following remark made by the latter in his dialogue *Al-Khazarî*, written about 1140: 'Christianity and Islam are the precursors and the initiators of the messianic era; they too serve to prepare men for the reign of truth and justice...'" *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, trans. by Nancy Pearson (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1973) p. 11. See also Schaya's essay "Some Universal Aspects of Judaism" in *The Unanimous Tradition*, ed. by Ranjit Fernando (Colombo: The Sri Lankan Institute of Traditional Studies, 1999), pp. 57-75.
10. "The Eliatic Function," p. 36. See also, René Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, trans. by Henry D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004) p. 254.
11. Ibn 'Aḥā' Allāh al-Iskandarî, *Kitāb Lahā'if al-Minan fî Manāqib Abî al-'Abbās al-Mursî wa Shaykhihi Abî al-Ēasan* (*The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abî al-'Abbās al-Mursî and his master Abî al-Ēasan al-Shādhili*), trans. by Nancy Roberts (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005), p. 101.
12. Éric Geoffroy writes, "*Tagāwwuf* has also been defined notably by Ibn Khaldî, as 'the knowledge that comes directly from God' (*al-'ilm al-ladunî*), in reference to verse 18:65: 'We taught him a knowledge [emanating] from

- Us.” “Approaching Sufism” from *Sufism: Love & Wisdom*, ed. by Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, Inc., 2006), p. 51. See also, A.K. Coomaraswamy, “Khwāja Khaṣr and the Fountain of Life, in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art,” *Studies in Comparative Religion* vol. 4 no. 4 (Middlesex, England: Perennial Books Ltd., 1970).
13. The term “*uwaysi*” derives from a name of a contemporary of the Prophet of Islam, Uways al-Qarānī (d. 657), who was guided by the Prophet Muḥammad spiritually while residing in Yemen without ever meeting the Prophet in the flesh. Uways was recognized as among the most eminent disciples of the Prophet and later joined Imam ‘Alī and was martyred in battle. Sufis who receive guidance from Khiṣr, the Hidden Imam, and other guides among the *rijāl al-ghayb* are considered to have an *uwaysi* guide and initiation.
  14. On Khiṣr’s association with Moses’ guide in *sīrat al-Kahf*, see Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣṣat al-anbiyā’* (*Stories of the Prophets*), trans. by Muhammad Mustafa Gemeiah (Mansoura, Egypt: El Nour Publishing, 1997), pp. 257-264. The Prophet of Islam states, “Al-Khaṣr was named so because he sat over a barren white land, [and] it turned green with plantation after.” *Ḥaḍīth al-Bukhārī*, book 55, *ḥadīth* 614. According to traditional Muslim commentators, Khiṣr’s full name is Abī ‘Abd al-Khaṣr Balyā ibn Malikān.
  15. Titus Burckhardt, “Concerning the ‘Barzakh’”, *Studies in Comparative Religion* vol. 13 no. 1 and 2 (Middlesex, England: Perennial Books Ltd., 1979), pp. 24-30; Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 50-51; and *The Message of the Qur’ān*, note 67, pp. 448-449.
  16. Farīd al-dīn ‘Aḥḥār, *Farid ad-Din ‘Aḥḥār’s Memorial of God’s Friends (Tadhkirat al-awliyā’)*, trans. by Paul Losensky (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), pp. 172-173.
  17. This story is also an Islamic answer to the question of theodicy if we extend Khiṣr’s apparently unjust actions to the evil that exists in this world. In both cases what appears as evil works towards a greater good if we have enough patience or foresight. This does not imply, however, that we should accept relative evil from our own souls or those of others. Only someone at Khiṣr’s station has the Divine permission and knowledge to preempt greater evils through acts, which at first glance appear to be in themselves evil, but are ultimately good and in accordance with the Divine Will.
  18. The Way of Khiṣr might also be described as the Way of Elias, Jesus or Muḥammad, for example.
  19. On the respect (*adab*) that Khiṣr shows to the Prophet Moses, to whom God spoke, see Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Ringstones of Wisdom (Fuṣṣṣat al-ḥikam)*, trans. by Caner Dagli (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004), pp. 260, 264-265.
  20. This sacred story of course has significance for exoterists and esoterists from all religions.

21. Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Khidr: The History of a Ubiquitous Master" *Sufi* 30, 1996, pp. 45-49. Toorawa states: "That Abī Bakr and 'Alī are the ones to identify him is noteworthy. They are the only two Companions of Muhammad to whom are ascribed esoteric (*bāḥini*) knowledge. This is why all Sufi *silsilas* (spiritual chains of investiture) derive from them and them alone. This hidden knowledge is not learned, it must be bestowed by God." *Ibid.*
22. Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006), pp. 220-221.
23. In India and Sri Lanka, Khiṛ is venerated and recognized as a guide by some Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others and is known as Khwājā Khiṛ, Pir Badar, and Rājā Kidār. He is also associated with the Green Knight at King Arthur's Round Table in the story *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a figure in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and appears in the *Alexander Romance*. See A.K. Coomaraswamy, "Khwāja Khaṛir and the Fountain of Life, in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art."
24. *Farid ad-Din 'Aḥḥār's Memorial of God's Friends*, p. 128.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
27. 'Alī Hujwiri, *Revelation of the Mystery (Kashf al-ma'jīb)*, trans. by R.A. Nicholson (Accord, NY: Pir Publications, 1999), p. 105.
28. According to the Shaykh al-akbar, each of the four pillars has an earthly representative who fulfills this function as a deputy or representative. On the question of the Pole and the pillars in the vision of Ibn 'Arabi, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints, Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 89-102. Chodkiewicz also states, "[the four pillars] are also called 'mountains' (*jibāl*) on account of Allāh's words (Qur'ān 78:6-7): 'Have we not made the earth into a cradle and the mountains into pillars (*awtādan*)?' For He stabilized the movement of the earth by means of the mountains, and the authority (*ḥukm*) of those of whom we are speaking (over the world) is analogous to the authority of the mountains over the earth." *Ibid.*, p. 97. Khiṛ is also often described as among the *afrād* or solitary saints who are not under the jurisdiction of the Pole. See René Guénon, *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, trans. by Henry D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001) pp. 181-182.
29. *Seal of the Saints*, pp. 93-94.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 62. Ibn 'Arabi's initiatic influences were by no means limited to Khiṛ, but also took the Way from his living masters, Jesus, other prophets, and the especially the Prophet of Islam.
31. Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. by Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993) pp. 63-64.
32. *Alone with the Alone*, p. 63.

33. Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations (al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah)*, ed. by Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. by James W. Morris (Oxford: Pir Press, 2005), p. 14.
34. Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), p. 34.
35. *The Mathnawī of Jalālu’d-dīn Rīmi: III & IV*, trans. by R.A. Nicholson (Warminster, Wiltshire: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1990), pp. 14-15.
36. *The Mathnawī of Jalālu’d-dīn Rīmi: V & VI*, trans. by R.A. Nicholson (Warminster, Wiltshire: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1990), p. 268.
37. Ivan Aguéli or ‘Abd al-Hādī in fact calls this type of initiation a “Marian initiation”: “The two initiatic chains: One is historical, the other spontaneous. The first is spread in known and established Sanctuaries under the direction of a living authorized Shaykh (Guru), who possesses the keys to the mystery. Such is the *al-Ta’limur-rijāl* or instruction of men. The other is *al-Ta’limur-rabbānī* or dominical or lordly instruction, which I venture to call ‘Marian initiation’ since it is that received by the Holy Virgin, mother of Jesus, son of Mary. There is always a master, but he can be absent, unknown, even dead for several centuries. In this initiation you draw from the present the same spiritual substance that others draw from antiquity...” quoted from René Guénon, *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, p. 180.
38. Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 69.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 69
40. For more on Schuon and the Islamic tradition as a whole, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition,” *Sophia* vol. 5, no. 1 (Oakton, VA: The Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1999), pp. 27-48.
41. Schaya also explicitly connects Schuon’s corpus with the “Eliatic flow”: “This spirituality appears, despite the contrary currents launched by the “Adversary”, to be making headway; one notes at the outward level, among other things, the growing interest in comparative religion, in the metaphysics of East and West and the various authentic paths leading man to the absolute. But it is important, as far as contemporary literature on this unanimous spirituality is concerned, to distinguish very carefully between what really expresses the truth revealed by the traditions—such as the works of Frithjof Schuon—and what is only a very inadequate, or even completely false, approach to it. The true “Eliatic flow” will grow stronger, according to the Scriptures, as the world’s darkness grows deeper... “The Mission of Elias,” p. 167
42. *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings*, p. 162. Schuon also states, “We can compare the particular mode of inspiration and orthodoxy that is esoterism to the rain which falls vertically from the sky, whereas the river—the outward tradition—flows horizontally, and in a continuous movement; in other words, tradition gushes forth from a spring, it is identified with a given founder of religion, whereas esoterism refers, above all and a priori, to an invisible

- filiation, represented in the Bible by Melchizedech, Solomon, and Elias, and associated in Sufism with al-Khiar, the mysterious immortal.” *In the Face of the Absolute* (Bloomington, IN, World Wisdom Inc., 1994), p. 234.
43. This association has also been made by Sufis with the Prophet of Islam, other prophets, the angels, and the Imam in Shî‘ism. See Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, trans. by Nancy Pearson (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 1994) pp. 121-144.
  44. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 323.
  45. René Guénon writes, “Recently, another question concerning initiatic affiliation has been raised, but to correctly assess its scope we should first of all say that it particularly concerns cases where initiation is obtained outside the ordinary and normal channels, and it must be clearly understood above all that such cases are never anything but exceptional, and that they occur when certain circumstances render normal transmission impossible, since their *raison d’être* is precisely to substitute in some measure for that transmission. We say ‘in some measure’ because such a thing can only happen with individuals possessing qualifications far beyond the ordinary and aspirations strong enough to in a way attract to themselves the spiritual influence that they would not find if left to their own devices, and also because for such individuals it is even rarer still-for lack of the assistance provided by constant contact with a traditional organization-that the results obtained through such an initiation are anything but fragmentary and incomplete. This cannot be insisted on too much, and yet to speak of such a possibility is nevertheless perhaps still not entirely without danger, if only because too many people have a tendency to entertain illusions in this regard; let an event occur in their lives that is a little extraordinary-or so it seems to them-but that is really rather commonplace, and they interpret it as a sign that they have received this exceptional initiation; and present-day Westerners in particular are all too easily tempted to seize upon the flimsiest pretext of this kind in order to dispense with a regular affiliation, which is why it is quite justified in insisting that as long as this latter is not in fact impossible to obtain one should not expect to receive any other kind of initiation apart from it.” *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, pp. 29-30. See also, *Ibid.*, pp. 180-182; and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Lahore: Suhail Academy Press, 1999), p. 59.
  46. *The Garden of Truth*, p. 108. Regarding spiritual wayfaring and ascension, Nasr also states “...Some have achieved the climb successfully without a human guide, through agencies of what Sufism calls “absent” or invisible guides (*rijâl al-ghayb*), such as Khiar, or the Hidden Imam. But they are the exceptions and not the rule. In Sufism the duties laid upon the shoulders of the disciples require their being active and not only in a passive state waiting for graces to descend from Heaven, although he or she must possess both active and passive perfection. That is why the disciple is called *murîd*, that is, the

- person who exercises his or her will, or *sālik*, which means traveler. It is as a traveler seeking to reach the peaks [of the spiritual path] that the disciple has need of a guide, who is none other than the spiritual master.” *Ibid.*, p. 112.
47. While signs and indications of the Mahdī’s return are replete throughout the Islamic sources, we are also told, “those who state a time [for the Return] are liars.” Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. by David Streight (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 123.
  48. Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam* (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1982), p. 19.
  49. *Sunan Abī Dā’id al-Sijistānī.*, book 36 *ḥadīth* 4272, trans. by Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Kuala Lumpur: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1983) p. 330.
  50. *Sunan Abī Dā’id al-Sijistānī.*, book 36 *ḥadīth* 4270.
  51. *Ibid.*, book 36 *ḥadīth* 4271.
  52. *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, p. 17.
  53. ‘Allāmah Ḥabāḥabā’i, *Shi’ite Islam*, trans. and ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1975), pp. 210-211.
  54. *Shi’ite Islam*, pp. 210-211. The abode of the Hidden Imam in the ‘*alam al-ghayb* is sometimes identified as a celestial green island (*al-jazīrah al-khaqrah*) and the land of Hīrqalyā or the eighth clime. Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. by Liadain Sherrard and Philip Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993) p. 70.
  55. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 1999), p. 28.
  56. René Guénon, *The King of the World*, trans. by Henry D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004) pp. 49-53. Shi’ite sources give several reasons for the greater and lesser occultations, including safeguarding the Imam, avoiding political entanglements, and testing the believers. To these can be added the fact that the providential cyclical decline of humanity would not have been possible if the *axis mundi* of the age held temporal power as well. According to Imam al-Sādiq, however, “...The deep reason [for the occultation] will not be unveiled until after [the Mahdī’s] manifestation, exactly in the same way that the deep reason for the sabotage of the ship, for the murder of the young man, and for the construction of the wall by al-Khiṣr was not revealed to Moses until later...” *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism*, p. 114.
  57. *Alone With the Alone*, p. 258.
  58. See “The Eliatic Function,” pp. 36-37.
  59. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 71-72
  60. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *Universal Man (al-Insān al-Kāmil)*, trans. by Titus Burckhardt and Angela Culme-Seymour (Roxburgh, Scotland: Beshara Publications, 1995), p. 58. Burckhardt then adds the following commentary: “One must not lose sight of the fact that the essence of this Unique Being is

- identical to the Divine Essence, so that there cannot be divergence between him and God. One may say that he does no do what God would not have done, or that God acts through him.” *Ibid.*, p. 58.
61. Shaykh al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance (Kitāb al-Irshād)*, trans. by I.K.A. Howard (Qum: Anḡariyan Publications), p. 554.
  62. On the symbolism of the sword in Islam, see René Guénon, “The Sword of Islam (*Sayf al-Islām*)” in *Symbols of Sacred Science*, trans. by Henry D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), pp. 179-184.
  63. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Spiritual Chivalry” in *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality: Vol. II Manifestations*, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Lahore: Suhail Academy Press, 2000), pp. 304-315.
  64. *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, pp. 121-122.
  65. On the esoteric significance on the Supreme Name in the Jewish tradition, see Leo Schaya’s chapter, “The Great Name of God,” in *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, pp. 145-165.
  66. On the pact at Hudaybiyyah, See Martin Lings’ chapter “A Clear Victory” in *Mu‘ammad: his life based on the earliest sources*, pp. 252-256. This oath of allegiance to the Prophet of Islam became the prototype for the initiatic pact made with the Shaykh in Sufism.
  67. Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore*, trans. by David Streight (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 68. Ibn ‘Arabī also states, “God will appoint as His ministers a group [of spiritual men] whom He has kept hidden for him in the secret recesses of His Unseen [i.e., the spiritual world]. God has acquainted [these Helpers], through unveiling and immediate witnessing, with the [Divine] Realities and the contents of God’s Command concerning His servants. So the Mahdi makes his decisions and judgments on the basis of consultation with them, since they are the true knowers, who really know what is There [in the Divine Reality]...” “The Mahdi’s Helpers ~ Chapter 366,” trans. by James W. Morris in *The Meccan Revelations vol. I (al-Fuṭūḡāt al-makkiyyah)*, ed. by Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2005), p. 70.
  68. *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, p. 25. While some traditions state that most of the Imam’s companions will be non-Arabs (*‘ajam*), we should note that-like the Prophet and Imams before him-the Mahdī is an Arab and that the above narration may relate to the fanatical and rigid tendencies especially associated with the Wahhabi sect originating from the Najd, but not all Arabs, who certainly have their fair share of knowledge and virtue.
  69. *The Meccan Revelations vol. I*, p. 69. It is necessary to state that nowhere, to our knowledge, does Ibn ‘Arabī identify the Mahdī as the Twelfth Imam, although some Shi‘ites have read in his writings on the Mahdī references to the Twelfth Imam.
  70. Henry Corbin writes concerning the color symbolism Shaykh Mu‘ammad Karīm-Khān Kirmānī associates with Imam al-Mahdī, “The pillar of white

light is here the mystical figure of the Twelfth Imam, the Imam of our times, the ‘Imam hidden from the senses but present to the hearts of those who believe in him.’ He is never named without the interpolation, ‘May God hasten our joy of him!’ This joy is his future advent as the Imam of the Resurrection, Renewer of the world, he who will restore the world to the state of purity that it possessed originally, at its creation (restoration, *apokatastasis*). This no doubt accounts for his role as the keeper of the white light. He bears the forename of the Prophet; he is the secret of *walāyah*, which...is itself the secret or esoteric dimension of prophecy, of the prophetic vocation and message...” *Temple and Contemplation*, trans. by Liadain Sherrard and Philip Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986) p. 42.

71. *The Meccan Revelations vol. I*, p. 77.
72. Trans. by Kareem Monib from Ibn Bābīyih al-Ḡadīq, ‘*Ilal al-sharā’i*’ (Najaf, 1966), p. 161. Amir-Moezzi, also translates a section of this *hadīth* as follows, “...He will take the Torah and the other holy Books from the cave and will judge the faithful of the Torah from the Torah, and the faithful of the Gospels from the Gospels...and the faithful of the Quran according to the Quran...” *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism*, p. 225.
73. For more on the symbolism of the cave, see René Guénon, *Symbols of Sacred Science*, trans. by Henry D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), pp. 193-222.
74. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 308. Nasr also writes, “Muslims have always had an innate feeling of possessing in their purest form the doctrines that all religions have come to proclaim before. In Islamic gnosis, or Sufism, this truth is *al-tawēid* in its metaphysical sense, the eternal wisdom, the *religio perennis*, which Islam has come to reveal in its fullness. For the Shari‘ite Muslim it is the doctrine of monotheism which he believes to have been revealed by every prophet. That is why at the end of the cycle the appearance of the Mahdī brings to light the common inner meaning of all religions.” *Sufi Essays* (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 1999), p. 132. Amir-Moezzi also states, “The Mahdī will also restore other religions, likewise abandoned and disfigured, to their original truth, in effect, it is said that he will take out of his cave, where they are hidden, all the holy Books of the earlier prophets, and that he will have their principles followed by their faithful.” *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism*, p. 119. See also, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, p. 25.
75. Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes, “Ibn ‘Arabī and following him Dā’īd al-Qayḡarī consider Christ as the universal ‘seal of sanctity’, and Ibn ‘Arabī refers indirectly to himself as the ‘particular seal of sanctity’ whereas most Shi‘ite authors believe these titles belong to ‘Alī and the Mahdī respectively. In this delicate question the distinction between the ‘universal seal of sanctity’ and the ‘particular or Muḥammadan seal of sanctity’ must be kept especially in mind...” *Sufi Essays*, p. 108. For the purpose of this subject the above passage highlights the more particular Islamic function of the Mahdī and the universal

- function of Jesus the Messiah, which certainly embraces Islam or submission to God and the Muslim community.
76. The Quran states, "We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things? Behold! They are in doubt regarding the encounter with their Lord. Behold! Truly He encompasses all things." (41:53-54)
  77. *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, p. 121.
  78. Here we have in mind the Supreme Knowledge of non-duality and *māyā* or the Unity and gradation of Light to use the language of Suhrawardī on the one hand, and the Intellect and the receptive rational and psychic faculties within man on the other.
  79. Regarding the *fuqahā'*, Ibn 'Arabī states, "If the swords were not in [the Mahdī's] hands, they would give him the death sentence." *An Ocean Without Shore*, p. 21.
  80. The Mahdī is not the Messiah himself, although part of the messianic function.
  81. *Riyadh al-salihin (Gardens of the Righteous)*, ed. by Imam Nawawi, trans. by Muhammad Zafrulla Khan (London: Islam International Publications Ltd., 1989) hadith 1814, p. 305.
  82. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) p. 166. Imam Ja'far al-Ġādiq also states, "There will come with the [Mahdī], peace be upon him, from the outskirts of Kīfa, twenty-seven men. Fifteen of the people of Moses who shed their blood for the truth and remained true to it, seven people from the cave, Joshua, Salmān, Abī Dujāna al-Aṅgarī, al-Miqdād and Mālik al-Ashtar. They will act as helpers (*angār*) and judges in his presence." *The Book of Guidance*, p. 554.
  83. William C. Chittick, "Eschatology," *Islamic Spirituality I: Foundations*, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), p. 401.
  84. Sufi psychology, based on the Quran and the soul of the Prophet, not only distinguishes between the body, soul and the Spirit, but also between the various levels of the soul. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Self-Awareness and Ultimate Selfhood," *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 15-23; and Mohammad Ajmal, "Sufi Science of the Soul," *Islamic Spirituality I: Foundations*, pp. 294-307.
  85. *Sufi Essays*, p. 66.
  86. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 72.
  87. On the relationship between the Shi'ite '*urafā'*' and the Hidden Imam during his occultation, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ġadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997), pp. 36-37, 51; and Sayyid M.H. Ḥabāḥabā'ī, *Kernel of the Kernel (Risāla-yi Lubb al-lubāb)*, ed. by Sayyid M.H.H. Tihrānī, trans. by

- Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 121-122, 130. Amir Moezzi also writes, “These believers are those that later sources called “men of the Invisible” (*rijāl al-ghayb*), and about whom it is said that their existence is indispensable to humanity, since they are the ones that will continue to transmit the Divine Science secretly until the Return of the Hidden Imam.” *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, p. 137.
88. For a comprehensive treatment of the subject of the Messiah in the world’s religion, see Charles Upton, *Legends of the End* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004). It is important to note that while the Mahdī and the Messiah are two distinct figures, it seems likely to us that the Kalki Avatar and Maitreya Buddha are designations for Jesus the Messiah in Hinduism and Buddhism. Based upon our understanding there will not be several renewers, each in a different religion, but one primary restorer of Tradition or Messiah known by various appellations.
89. “The Eliatic Function,” p. 40. On the universal significance of the invocation (*dhikr*) of the Name of God in various religions, especially as it relates to this epoch, see Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), pp. 145-148, 163-166.

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