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# Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's (RAA) Reform of the Religious Scholars of His Time & the Appearance of Salah al-Din

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Praise be to God who girded His saints with the sword victory and placed on their heads the crown of honor, awe, and nobility and made them the way marks of guidance as a special mercy to all creation so that humanity board with them the ark of safety and salvation in this life and after death.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the remembrance of al-Qutb al-Ghawth (the Pole and Saintly Helper) known in his native Persian as “Pir-e dast-e Gir” (the great and noble lord who takes your hand for support and victory) – Shaykh Muhyi al-Din (Reviver of the Religion) ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani al-Hasani al-Husayni al-Sharif – the Sultan of all the saints.



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The great late English Muslim scholar Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din) – may God have mercy on him – asserts that probably no Muslim after the Prophet (PBUH) and the Rightly-Guided Caliphs – may God be pleased with them – until today has left such a profound and far-reaching effect on Muslims than Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani.

The late great German Muslim writer and researcher Annemarie Schimmel, God have mercy on her, notes that al-Qutb al-Ghawth Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir won the love of the entire Umma; in the world of Islam there is no saint more dear to the hearts of all Muslims whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated than Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani.



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Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir ranked among the greatest religious scholars of his time by the consensus of all Muslims – Hanafis, Shafi’is, Malikis and Hanbalis. al-Nawawi says. “Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir was the master of all the great scholars of the Shafi’i and Hanbali schools”. His student Muwaffaq al-Din ibn Qudama remarked that Shakh ‘Abd al-Qadir mastered 13 outward sciences of Shari’a perfectly and no student of knowledge had to look for other teachers. He was a sea of outward knowledge in the sciences of the Qur’an, Hadith, Islamic Law, the art of giving fatwas and other branches of knowledge.

It is well known that Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani reformed, united, and first organized the Sufis of his time into orders. All of the great Sufi masters of his age recognized his Imamate and hearkened to his will. The Qadiri Sufi Order quickly spread to all corners of the Muslim world during his lifetime and after his death – so that the Qadiri Order became and remains the greatest, largest and most numerous of all the Sufi orders in Islam. In the time of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir, the two words “Sufi” and “Qadiri” became synonymous. To be a Sufi meant to be a Qadiri. To be a Qadiri meant to be a true Sufi.



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Many people may not be aware, however, that one of the dimensions of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir's greatness and his profound influence on the Muslims of his time was that he strove to produce a new generation of Muslims not just to revive true Islam but to defeat the crusaders in Palestine & Greater Syria. The victories of Nur al-Din Zangi and his general, Salah al-Din Ayyubi and the re-conquest of Jerusalem also stand as a testimony to the efforts of al-Qutb al-Ghawth 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and the thousands of upright men and women that appeared with that new generation.

For all these reasons and many more, the umma concurred on proclaiming the excellence of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and their love for him. And the great scholars of Islam agreed in their recognition of his greatness.



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While the great Sufi masters called him the Sultan of all God's saints, the greatest spiritual helper and other titles of honor – the great scholar of hadith, al-Hafiz al-Dhahabi, said of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir: "He is the perfect exemplar, the Shaykh of Islam, the waymark of all saints & the reviver of the religion [of Islam]".

The great scholar of Islam, Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, said of him: "Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir had no peer. His reputation was known far and wide. He was firmly established in sound practice and knowledge. He was THE shaykh of his time. He was the sultan of all other shaykhs. He was the noble lord presiding over the people of the [Sufi] path in his time. He was the master of [all] spiritual stations. He enjoyed the total acceptance of all [the people]. He was held in greatest esteem in his time by all shaykhs of the age, the religious scholars and ascetics. Many people would repent of their sins in his presence.



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Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiya took great pride in the fact that he was a Qadiri and one of the followers Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. He once said that were it not for his spiritual connection to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir and holding to his daily Qadiri devotions, he would never have been able to attain the accomplishments he achieved in knowledge, writing and practice. He said in praise of al-Qutb al-Ghawth: “Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani was among the greatest of people in adhering to the duty of commanding right and forbidding wrong and instructing others to do it too – while walking in harmony with appointed destiny – that is, responding appropriately to the signs of the time with patience, perseverance, proper preparation and organization.”



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Among the most important qualities that Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiya noted in al-Qutb al-Ghawth was the fact that he walked harmoniously in conjunction with divine destiny. He understood the harsh realities of his time. Among the greatest lessons we gain from Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir was his long patience and perseverance in meeting the impossible circumstances before him. Thus, he took his time to do things right and spent 32 years in spiritual and intellectual preparation under the greatest scholars and shaykhs of his time – especially Ibn ‘Aqil – before his public appearance to guide and teach in Baghdad in the year 520/1127 after having completed 50 years of his life.

The age in which Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir lived was a time of troubles, corruption and instability – very similar to the situation in which Muslims find themselves today. The first crusade began in the year 489/1096 when Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir was 19 years old – just one year after he arrived in Baghdad to seek knowledge. The crusaders occupied Jerusalem, Palestine, and much of Greater Syria and massacred innocent civilians in every place.





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The loss of Palestine did not serve to awaken the Muslim Umma but only increased them in negligence and corruption. The caliph in Baghdad became powerless and the various princes and sultans were busy competing against each other and fighting civil wars. Their only concern was power and self-interest. Most of the religious scholars were accomplices to this crime. They lived lives of hypocrisy, self-service, flattery, and winning the favor of the rulers in power. Ibn 'Aqil – Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir's greatest teacher – said of them: "The religious scholars of our time are a disaster. To seek prosperity in them is to court bankruptcy. There is no one to depend upon [now] but God alone."



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When Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir appeared at the age of 50 in 520/1127 after 32 years of preparation, he appeared with tremendous intellectual and spiritual power. The great Hanbali scholar Ibn Rajab says of him: “He won the complete acceptance of the people...and the kings hold him in fear and awe, not to mention those who were less powerful.”

It is not mere coincidence that the year Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir appeared in Baghdad was the same year that the great mujahid king and shahid ‘Imad al-Din Zangi came to city’s rescue and was then followed by his son Nur al-Din and then their general Salah al-Din – all of whom stood with Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir – just as he stood with them.



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Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir did not like to show off his honorary miracles (karamat). Rather, he based his movement on truthfulness and integrity in applying the Qur’an and Sunna. But God, exalted be He, empowered Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir with startling honorary miracles to give him success in his work. The great Muslim scholar ‘Izz al-Din ibn ‘Abd as-Salam – sultan of religious scholars – says: “The honorary miracles of none of God’s saints have been transmitted to us by tawatur (many multiple transmissions) except Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir. That is because most of them took place publicly before large crowds.”

The caliph in Baghdad and oppressive rulers there and elsewhere only submitted to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir, feared him, and held him in awe because of his honorary miracles. A good example of this is what took place between him and the ‘Abbasid caliph Abu al-Muzaffar al-Mustanjid bi-llah shortly after Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir’s appearance as the story is narrated to us by the Imam al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-’Asqalani.



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By the time of Shaykh ‘Abd-Qadir, the caliph had become like the oppressive mayor of the city. He had no international power or influence and had become very weak. The caliph al-Mustanjid came to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir to test him shortly after his fame had begun to spread through Baghdad and surrounding areas. He said to the Shaykh: “I want you to show me something [of your miracles].”

The Shaykh replied: “What do you desire?”

The caliph said: “Apples.” [It was not apple season at the time.]

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir extended his hands in the open air and brought down two apples.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir gave one of the apples to the caliph. He broke open the other one and it gave off the scent of fresh musk. The caliph broke open his apple and it had a worm in it.

The caliph said: “What’s the meaning of this?”

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir replied: “This apple has been touched by the hand of the oppressor, so it became wormy.”



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In the days following the event, that caliph sought to appease Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir, thinking that he might buy him off as he had bought off other religious scholars. He came to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir one day and placed before him ten large sacks of gold, carried by ten different servants. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir refused them and said: “I have no need of them.”

The caliph insisted that Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir take the sacks of gold. So he took up one of them in his right hand and another in his left hand. He squeezed them with his hands and blood began to flow from them. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir said to the caliph: “Abu al-Muzaffar, don’t you have any shame? You take the innocent blood of the people and present it to me as a gift?”

The caliph fainted. When he came back to consciousness, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir said to him, “If it were not for the sanctity of your lineage being connected to the House of God’s Messenger – may God extol him and grant him peace – I would make this blood follow you back to your palace.”



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In the eyes of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir, the greatest crime of the age was not the oppression of the rulers but the evil of hypocritical religious scholars who supported the rulers in their oppression, stood by their side, and enabled them to commit oppression – seeking material interests in this world.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir attacked such evil religious scholars relentlessly just as he attacked the oppressive rulers and the wealthy who oppressed the poor and withheld their wealth from them.

He would say to them: “You traitors of religious knowledge and practice! You enemies of God and His Messenger! You highway robbers who cut off God’s servants, powerful and majestic is He. You are in clear oppression! You are in clear hypocrisy! How long will this hypocrisy last? You scholars! You so-called ascetics! How long will you continue to play the hypocrite with kings and sultans so that you can take some of the scraps of this world and its pleasures and desires?”



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Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir earnestly prayed: “God, break the power of the hypocrites. Reduce the oppressors to subjugation, and cleanse the earth of them. Or reform them and set them right.”

We need this prayer today as much as yesterday and ask God to answer. All the problems of the Muslim Umma today and our weakness and utter impotence in the face of the Palestinian crisis and others go back to two major causes: The power of the hypocrites among our religious scholars, shaykhs and others and the tyranny of the oppressors who rule over us.

But Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir was an embodiment of the universal Muhammad mercy of our Prophet – God extol him and grant him peace. He preferred that God reform the hypocrites and tyrants and set them right rather than remove them from the face of the earth when he prayed: “God, cleanse the earth of them or reform them and set them right.”



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The life of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir was dedicated in its entirety to reform and setting things right: The reform of the common people and the ruling elites, of the religious scholars and their students, the rulers and their soldiers, and others.

Al-Qutb al-Ghawth, our noble lord Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani adopted many methods for reform. Among the most important of these were his profound efforts when he was 76-80 between the years 546-550/1151-1155 to reform all the Sufis of the Muslim world and unify them into a single order under his leadership. During these four years, he held big conferences in and around Baghdad for this purpose, in Mecca and Medina during the Hajj, and Sufi masters around the world sent their muqaddams to Baghdad to be trained by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir in his school.





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Above all else, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir was sent as a teacher. He took pride in the profession of teaching and regarded it as the most notable attribute and magnificent station that a person could attain. Every day he sat with his students to teach them tafsir, hadith, fiqh, the various readings of the Qur’an, fatwas, and other Islamic sciences. He welcomed each and every student whether they were old or young, rich or poor, educated or illiterate.

The most conspicuous method tht Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir used to reform the religious scholars and students and to create a new generation – the generation of Nur al-Din and Salah al-Din – was to create a new system of education for spreading and implementing knowledge. His activities directed at Greater Syria and Palestine were greater in this regard than his activities in Iraq. He would send his best students to take active part in spreading the daw’a and taking part in the jihad movement under the direction of both Nur al-Dina and Salah al-Din who esteemed his efforts and welcomed his students and followers as soldiers, counselors, and men of the da’wa.



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Likewise, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir welcomed as students and personal guests, the refugees from Palestine and Syria and their families who fled from the horror of the crusader occupation of their lands. He would then give them spiritual, moral, and educational preparation and send their sons back to the battlefronts to serve in the armies of Nur al-Din and Salah al-Din. Many of them attained great fame and the followers of the Qadiri Order became known for their courage and resoluteness in the face of the enemy.

This is a brief account of a long and very great story. We take pride today in remembering this great hero and savior of Islam - Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, al-Qutb al-Ghawth, Pir-e dast-e Gir – the noble sayyid who gives you a helping hand and never betrays you. It is obligatory for us to bring his memory to life in these dark times and to remind each other of his life which all the Umma has agreed was truly great and dignified.



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In conclusion, perhaps the most useful point we can emphasize in following the path of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir is the necessity to walk in harmony with destiny. We must be patient, long-suffering, and we must endure and persevere and make the right preparations. There are no shortcuts to victory and haste is from Satan.

The illustrious scholar al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani relates to us: “Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir was asked – ‘What is the one thing you built all your work upon?’. He replied: ‘Being honest and truthful.’”

We ask God – our Patron Lord and Benefactor – exalted be He – that He makes us all people of truth and honesty who fulfill their promises and covenants and are worthy of the honor of belonging to the great Hashimite Prophet – God exalt him and grant him peace – and his glorious Umma.



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As the great mujtahid and mujaddid – the Qutb of the realm of divine holiness – the sharif and noble lord Ahmad ibn Idris - God be pleased with him - said: “Truthfulness is a perfect sword that never takes a nick. It is a noble war horse that never stumbles, and it is the foundation of the Path to God.”

God, it is You we ask for help – so come to our help. It is You that we implore for aid – so come to our aid. It is upon You that we place our reliance – so give us all we need. O God Who are all we need – give us all we need to meet the challenges of this world and the next. Grant us the gift and infinite success of honesty & truthfulness. Fill our hearts with the love of those who are honest & truthful. Bless us to love and cherish the poor and oppressed. And grant us the wisdom to recognize the sanctity of all Your saints. Amin.