

Shaykh Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī (ra) & his love for the poor

Introduction

Al-Ghawth al-A'zam Shaykh Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī (d. 561 AH/1166 CE) - may Allāh shower His infinite blessings upon his grave - never stood in respect to any king, emir or caliph. If anything, they stood for him. Muhammad ibn Khidr reported that his father said:

“I served the Shaykh [Abd al-Qādir] for thirteen years. During this period, I never saw him spit, blow his nose or that a fly ever rested on him. He never stood up as a sign of respect for anybody nor did he sit in the company of any sovereign or eat their food. When he wrote to the Caliph, he addressed him with the words: ‘Abd al-Qādir commands you to do such-and-such and his obedience is compulsory upon you.’ When the Caliph read his letters, he used to weep and say: ‘The Shaykh is right.’”¹

Having said that, he would *always* stand for the poor and needy. He always had time and respect for the *fuqarā*. Why did he prefer the company of the poor rather than the privileged? This short article will Insha Allāh explore four principle reasons for this.

Why Shaykh Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī (ra) loved the poor

1. Al-Ghawth al-A'zam was following the Sunna of his master, Sayyiduna Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), who had a deep love for the poor and needy. Our Master (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was offered all the money and wealth in the world, yet he chose to associate himself with the poor throughout his blessed life.

a. His (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) *du'ās* were always with them. In fact, he prayed to live, die and be raised with them:

اللهم أَحْيِنِي مَسْكِينًا وَ أَمِتْنِي مَسْكِينًا وَ احْشُرْنِي فِي زَمْرَةِ الْمَسَاكِينِ

O Allāh! Give me life as a poor person, death as one, and raise me in the company of the poor [on the Day of Judgement].

¹ *The Onlooker's Delight (Ghibta al-Nazir Fi Tarjama al-Shaykh Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī)*, p. 49. HSBT Publications.

b. Allāh instructed him (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) never to say 'no' to the poor and those who came for help:

و اما السائل فلا تنهر

As for the beggar, do not rebuke him (93: 10).

Our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) hardly ever said 'no'. In fact, one Arab poet commented that were it not for the لا in the *Kalima Sharīf*, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) might not have said 'no' in his entire life:

ما قال لا قط الا في تشهده
لولا التشهد كانت لاءه نعم

c. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) never felt ashamed to walk, converse and sit with the poor.

d. Though mosques are not really residential, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) housed the poor people of al-Madīna next to his own house, namely the *As'hāb al-Suffa*. Whenever the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was offered food and gifts, they were the first recipients.

2. Al-Ghawth al-A'zam himself experienced severe poverty himself. He went through hunger and thirst on an extreme level. In his own words, he said:

'I remained once, at the beginning of my career in Baghdād, twenty days without food or anything lawful to eat. So I went to the ruins of Chosroes's Great Porch looking for something lawful to eat. There, I found seventy righteous men who were looking for the same thing I was looking for. I said to myself: 'Competing with these men betrays a lack of manliness.'²

For one year I ate only what people threw away and hardly drank water. One year I only drank water and hardly ate anything. Another year I did not eat, drink or sleep.³

Hence, he could relate to them better. He knew how it felt to be hungry and thirsty. He was one of them during his early life.

If you know how hunger feels, then you are more likely to associate yourselves with the poor. Marcus Rashford was rightly praised for his extensive efforts in helping needy children in 2020. His sincerity in this cause stemmed from the fact he experienced hunger as a child himself. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, many have volunteered to help the most needy in society, donations to food banks for example. In our lifetimes

² *The Onlooker's Delight (Ghibta al-Nazir Fi Tarjama al-Shaykh Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī)*, p. 8. HSBT Publications.

³ *Ibid.* p.15.

now, there is only one period when we feel real hunger, when we can truly say 'we are starving'; when Ramadān falls in the summer months.

3. Sitting with the poor makes you thankful. This is why al-Ghawth al-A'zam sat with the poor, because it made him a better person. If you want to become a better person, sit with the poor. Admiring the rich and famous, drooling over their possessions and wishing to live in their mansions is the quickest way to envy and jealousy. Our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) taught us to ignore the life of the rich and famous and instead focus at the poor. He remarked:

أَنْظُرُوا إِلَيَّ مَنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنْكُمْ وَلَا تَنْظُرُوا إِلَيَّ مَنْ هُوَ فَوْقَكُمْ فَهُوَ أَجْدَرُ أَنْ لَا تَزِدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ

Look at those who are beneath you and do not look at those who are above you. For this is better so that you do not belittle the favours of Allāh.⁴

4. Al-Ghawth al-A'zam understood what the poor and needy do in society. He understood their position and rank; that it is thanks to them that everyone else is given provisions. Seemingly, the poor cannot contribute to society. In reality, it is their *du'ās* that make everything run. It is via their *wasīla* that our *du'ās* are answered. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

انما نصر الله هذه الامة بضعفائها بدعوتهم و صلاتهم و اخلاصهم

Assistance to this Ummah will only come via its poor; by virtue of their supplications, prayers and sincerity.⁵

In another hadīth sharīf, he (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

ابغوني الضعيف فانكم ترزقون و تنصرون بضعفائكم

Locate me amongst the poor. For indeed you are provided for and are assisted thanks to your poor [members of society].

The poor have a very pivotal role to play in society, it is their *Ameen* that we all need. Globally today, we are unfortunately accustomed to seeing the ill-treatment of the poor, the disabled, the immigrants and the refugees. As a result - may Allāh protect us - we may lose their precious *du'ās*.

May Allāh shower his infinite mercy upon the grave of Shaykh Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, and enable us all to benefit from his teachings, Ameen.

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⁴ Sahih Muslim

⁵ Tafsir al-Qurtubi, II: 20.