# EPISTEMOLOGY OF SUFISM AND THE WITNESS OF SYEKH ABDUL QADIR AL-JAILANI AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TREASURE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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## Abstract

Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani is a great Sufi figure widely known in the Sunni Sufism tradition. His thoughts and teachings not only formed the map of classical Islamic spirituality, but also made important contributions to the construction of Sufism epistemology and the concept of guardian. This study discusses in depth how the epistemology of Sufism was developed by Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, emphasizing the sources of spiritual knowledge such as kasyf, ilham, and ma'rifah, as well as how the concept of sainthood is interpreted as the highest realization of the human spiritual journey. Furthermore, this article also explores how his legacy of thought has implications for the development of Islamic thought in the modern era, particularly in responding to the crisis of spirituality and materialistic tendencies that are developing in the contemporary world. With a qualitative approach and hermeneutic analysis of the works of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani such as Futuh al-Ghaib and al-Fath al-Rabbani, this paper shows that the epistemology of Sufism can be an alternative in building a more holistic, integrative, and transcendental scientific paradigm. Ultimately, Sheikh Abdul Qadir's thoughts are not only relevant as a spiritual legacy, but also as an offer of solutions for modern Islamic civilization which is seeking a balance between rationality and spirituality.
*Keywords:Epistemology of Sufism; Territory; Islamic Thought*

## Abstrak

Syekh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani merupakan tokoh sufi besar yang dikenal luas dalam tradisi tasawuf Sunni. Pemikiran dan ajaran beliau tidak hanya membentuk peta spiritualitas Islam klasik, tetapi juga memberikan kontribusi penting terhadap

konstruksi epistemologi tasawuf dan konsep kewalian (wilayah). Penelitian ini membahas secara mendalam tentang bagaimana epistemologi tasawuf dikembangkan oleh Syekh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, dengan menekankan pada sumber-sumber pengetahuan spiritual seperti kasyf, ilham, dan ma'rifah, serta bagaimana konsep kewalian dimaknai sebagai realisasi tertinggi dari perjalanan spiritual manusia. Selanjutnya, artikel ini juga mengeksplorasi bagaimana warisan pemikiran beliau berimplikasi terhadap perkembangan pemikiran Islam di era modern, khususnya dalam menjawab krisis spiritualitas dan kecenderungan materialistik yang berkembang di dunia kontemporer. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis hermeneutik terhadap karya-karya Syekh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani seperti *Futuh al-Ghaib* dan *al-Fath al-Rabbani*, tulisan ini menunjukkan bahwa epistemologi tasawuf dapat menjadi alternatif dalam membangun paradigma ilmu yang lebih holistik, integratif, dan transendental. Pada akhirnya, pemikiran Syekh Abdul Qadir tidak hanya relevan sebagai warisan spiritual, tetapi juga sebagai tawaran solusi bagi peradaban Islam modern yang tengah mencari keseimbangan antara rasionalitas dan spiritualitas.

**Kata Kunci:** *Epistemologi Tasawuf; Kewalian; Pemikiran Islam*

## Introduction

It's certainly not easy to discuss politics and religion separately in a study of the history of Islamic thought. This is because Islam does not recognize a separation between religion and politics. Therefore, in describing religious conditions, our study cannot be separated from socio-political conditions (Zainudin, 2002). The late 5th and early 6th centuries, amidst intense political upheaval, had a profound impact on the thinking and lifestyle of the people, including Muslim figures and scholars. This reality did not drag Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani into the darkness of ignorance and helplessness. Baghdad was the capital of the kingdom occupied by a caliph, Naisabur and Ray, the capital of the Sultanate of Bani Seluk. Baghdad was the center of the religious world, while Naisabur and Ray were the center of the political world, which was played by the Seljuq rulers (Syalabi, 1974).

At a time when the destruction of the Ummah was increasing, hypocrisy, superstition, heresy and the practice of Islamic law were increasingly being abandoned everywhere, a mujahid and mujaddid appeared who had prepared themselves long beforehand through esoteric training. He is a man of strong faith and extensive knowledge and knowledge, who never gives up when calling on people to strive for jihad in the way of Allah, his voice is strong and loud to rise up to reform the belief system in Islam correctly which returns to the Al-Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet and is not a hypocritical attitude. He even went so far as to launch a war against the nifak attitude that had taken root in the government. He is Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, the name of a figure who never stops talking about people.

Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani is a Sufi figure who has had great followers and influence in history. He is known as the ruler of the saints (Sulthan al-Auliya') and the leader of the Sufis (Imam al-Ashfiya'). His personality was very noble and pious,

making him have a high position in his community. He was a Muslim spiritual figure who truly lived out the true spirit of Islam, so that he received the title muhyi al-din (liver of religion). The humanistic and moderate orientation of his thinking makes him a peace-loving personality. The Sufi congregation to which he is attributed (Qadiriyah) is the oldest and has the widest distribution area. He succeeded in converting many people, both Christians and Jews, to embrace Islam. Due to its greatness and the number of karamat it has, it has received a lot of attention and praise, which has even reached the point of cultism.

Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani is a Sufi figure who has great charisma and influence among Muslims, especially among the Sufi brotherhood, both in his time and now. Among the Sufi brotherhood in Indonesia, for example, al-Jailani's name is always mentioned on various occasions to send prayers to the spirits of ancestors for the purpose of tawasul. There are even some Sufi congregations who combine the sentence of tauhid with his name: La ilaha Illa-'llah Muhammadurrasulullah, Syaikh Abdul Qadir Jailani Waliyyu-'llah. This fact shows that al-Jailani is a symbol of great spiritualism among the Sufi brotherhood to this day, especially in relation to Sufism.

Sufism is a major branch of the Islamic intellectual tradition, emphasizing the esoteric, spiritual, and experiential dimensions of religion. Throughout the history of the Muslim community, Sufism has played a role not only in shaping individual religious character but also as an epistemological foundation for the birth of various traditions of Islamic thought and practice. One of the central figures in the development of Sufism isSheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani(d. 561 H/1166 M), a Sufi, cleric, and founder of the Qadiriyah Order which until now has had a wide influence in the Islamic world, including in the Nusantara region (Bruinessen, 1999).

Sheikh Abdul Qadir's charisma lies not only in his spiritual and social influence as a great saint, but also in his intellectual contribution in building the epistemological framework of Sufism. Through his various works, such as Futuh al-Ghaib and al-Fath al-Rabbani, he explains how spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifah*) does not only come from revelation and rationality, but also through spiritual experience, inspiration, and kashf obtained through the process of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) (Al-Jailani, 2003). In this context, the epistemology of Sufism becomes an alternative to the dominant rational-textual epistemology of Islam, and opens up space for transcendental experience as a legitimate source of knowledge in Islam (Syamsuddin Arif, 2002).

The concept of sainthood (*wilāyah*), which is at the heart of Sheikh Abdul Qadir's teachings, also made a significant contribution to shaping the discourse of spiritual authority in Islam. Wilāyah, in his understanding, is not merely an individual spiritual status, but rather the result of absolute closeness to God through a long and challenging spiritual journey (Schimmel, 1996). This concept is important to re-examine

in the context of contemporary Islamic thought which tends to experience a disjunction between rationality and spirituality.(Hidayat, 2007).

Amid the global spiritual crisis and disorientation of religious identity in the modern era, the thought of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani offers an alternative paradigm that balances the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of religion. Therefore, a study of the epistemology of Sufism and the concept of sainthood he developed is not only important in a historical context but also highly relevant in shaping a more comprehensive, inclusive, and transformative framework for Islamic thought today.

Mimi Jamilah Mahya's research entitled "The Concept of Sainthood According to Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani." The results of her research show that a saint for Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani is a true heir who not only possesses external knowledge, but is also bestowed with internal knowledge or secret knowledge inherited from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Sainthood according to Sheikh Al-Jailani can be achieved by perpetuating the remembrance of Allah and adorning oneself with praiseworthy qualities (Mahya, 2021).

Ali Mashar and Nailal Muna's research is entitled *"The Philosophy of Sufism Ethics of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani: A Study of the Ethics of a Salik in the Book of Ghunyat li Thalibi Thariq al-Haqq"*. The results of his research show that the ethics of Sufism of a salik according to Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani in the book of Ghunyat are focused on fixed values within the corridor of the Qur'an and Sunnah, his soul is clean from the urge of lust, always bound and pleased with Allah, positions himself lower than others, subordinates himself to others in providing assistance, maintains harmony, emphasizes respect and compassion, and does not become the cause of others being hurt.(Mashar & Muna, 2020).

Research entitled *"The Thoughts of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani on Ma'rifat"* by Kafrawi. The results of his research show thatMa'rifah is the determination of the heart to believe in the presence of the necessary being of Allah, who depicts all of His perfections. Meanwhile, ma'rifat regarding the attributes of Allah is truly knowing that Allah is All-Living, All-Knowing, All-Powerful, All-Hearing, All-Seeing with all His perfect attributes. So, the signs of ma'rifah are the life of the heart with Allah SWT. People who can achieve ma'rifah must go through a spiritual journey, namely having the intention to purify their faith, perform sincere repentance, perform asceticism and perform continuous worship, both outward and inner worship. Inner worship must be strengthened by four kinds of attitudes and behaviors, namely: Reducing speech, Reducing eating, Reducing sleeping, Isolating oneself (Kafrawi, 2020).

Zainul Arifin,in his thesis entitled *"The Concept of Guardianship in the Sufistic Thought of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani"*, reviewing descriptively the position of guardian, the requirements for guardianship, as well as the spiritual attributes inherent in guardians from al-Jailani's perspective (Arifin, 2018). However, this study has not

yet explored the epistemological framework that underlies the conception of sainthood philosophically.

This research will focus on examining the epistemology of Sufism and the concept of sainthood in the thought of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, as well as exploring its implications for the treasures of Islamic thought in the modern era. The approach used is descriptive-analytical with a theoretical basis from Islamic philosophy and classical Sufism studies. This research will examine the conception of Sufism and the holy side of a figure who is very popular among Muslims in general, namely Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani. Every time there were ulama who were very famous, they were known to be very sincere and intelligent in interpreting and deepening religious knowledge, Allah Swt always presented ulama as Islamic reformers in their time, such as the presence of Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad Bin Muhammad Al-Ghazali At-Thusi Asy-Syafi'iah or often known as Imam Al-Ghazali, who was famous in the 5th century Hijriah.

At the end of every hundred years, Allah SWT will present ulama as Mujaddid of Islam. The Islamic reformer and successor to Sufistic Sufism in the development of Islam was presented by Allah SWT at the end of 100 years after Imam Al-Ghazali, who was a cleric who was also very famous for his supremacy, and was even nicknamed Mujaddid or reformer cleric. He is Sheikh Abdul Qodir Al-Jailani, a scholar whose authority has been visible since childhood, and is also the successor to Sufism as previously put forward by Imam Al-Ghazali.

Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jaelani is a well-known scholar, especially in Indonesia. He is highly revered by those who study the tarekat (Islamic order) and among Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. His reputation is well-known throughout the country, even in remote villages. This research is classified as library research, supplemented by relevant supporting data.

**Research Methods**

A research method is a method of working, a systematic set of steps designed to understand the research object. Methods are a crucial component in determining the research outcome. This research is a library research study, namely research conducted by collecting data, supporting literature and researching through references related to the epistemology of Sufism and the sainthood of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani (Surahmad, 1982). The nature of this research is descriptive-analytical-comparative, namely systematically describing the epistemology of Sufism and the sainthood of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani.

The data sources in this research are divided into two parts, the author looked for data or direct reference sources through his works related to ethics, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data source in question is the main reference in

discovering the thoughts of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani. Meanwhile, secondary data sources are those obtained from books, media, or other available sources. Secondary data sources are needed to support analysis of the topic being discussed, for example through journals, internet data, newspapers, and so on. Other related writings serve as secondary materials. The data collection technique used is the documentation method, which will later be used for research (Sukandararrumidi, nd).

The data analysis method in this study focuses on the epistemology of Sufism and the sainthood of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani. Efforts to strengthen the argument will also be made by including other relevant thoughts, which may be obtained through books, articles, or other forms of work. This type of analysis model is usually called taxonomic analysis, namely an analysis that focuses on the thoughts of the figure (Furchan & Maimun, 2005). This taxonomic analysis is different from the analysis used to obtain a comprehensive picture of a figure's thoughts.

Overall, the discussion in this study will of course continue to focus on elements of research methods and interpretation, which will undoubtedly be important and useful for critically analyzing the author's proposed theme. After the data, both primary and secondary data, are collected, they are processed and analyzed. Then the author uses a philosophical approach. Through this approach, researchers want to try to reconstruct the epistemology of Sufism and the sainthood of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani.

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research. This approach was chosen because the object of study focuses on the thoughts of figures, particularly the epistemological understanding of Sufism and the concept of sainthood in the works of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani and their relevance in the treasury of contemporary Islamic thought. The data sources in this study consist of: Primary sources, in the form of authentic works of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani such as *Futūḥal-Ghayb*, *al-Ghunyah liṬalibī Ṭarīq al-Ḥaqq*, and *Sirr al-Asrār* which became the main basis for exploring his thought. Secondary sources include books, scientific articles, journals, dissertations and other academic works relevant to the themes of Sufism, Islamic epistemology and sainthood. Data collection techniques are carried out through documentation, by reading, recording and classifying data from various sources systematically.

The analytical techniques used are content analysis to identify the conceptual structure of the text, and a hermeneutic approach to understand the profound and symbolic meanings of the Sufi doctrine developed by Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani. Through these methods, this research is expected to uncover the relevance of classical Sufi thought in responding to the dynamics of Islamic spirituality and thought in the modern era.

**Research Results and Discussion**
**The Epistemology of Sufism of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani**

The epistemology of Sufism developed by Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani relies on the paradigm that the highest knowledge (*ma'rifah*) is not merely obtained through rational activity (akal), but through a spiritual approach that involves cleansing the soul *(tazkiyah al-nafs)*, spiritual practice (*riyadhah*), and inner revelation (*kasyf*). For him, true divine knowledge can only be obtained by a heart that has been illuminated by Divine light.

In *Futūh al-Ghayb,* Sheikh al-Jailani identified that the form of knowledge is tiered, namely: 'Ilm al-yaqīn: knowledge based on evidence (reason and revelation), this is the level of knowledge based on evidence, both reason (rational) and revelation (*naqli*). At this level, a person knows the truth through learning and rational understanding of the Qur'an, hadith, and intellectual evidence. For example: someone is sure about the existence of fire because they see smoke and hear an explanation.*'Ayn al-yaqīn:* knowledge based on inner witnessing is the level of knowledge based on direct inner witnessing (*kasyf*). Here, belief arises because someone sees the truth with the eyes of their heart, not just hearing or understanding theoretically. For example: someone sees the fire directly, not just knows from the description. Whereas, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*: knowledge based on direct spiritual experience with the ultimate reality. This is the highest level of faith, when one experiences and spiritually unites with the ultimate reality. Not just knowing or witnessing, but experiencing it existentially. For example: a person enters a fire and feels the heat—that is, becomes one with the experience (Al-Jailani, n.d.a).

These three levels illustrate the epistemic path in Sufism, from information (data), to contemplation (tafakur), and finally to existential union (fanā') and intuitive spiritual knowledge. Thus, knowledge within the framework of Sufism is not the result of ordinary learning, but rather the result of a profound spiritual journey.

**The Concept of Guardianship in the Thought of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani**

Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani has an important position in the formation of the concept of sainthood in the Sufi tradition. According to him, a guardian is a servant of Allah who has achieved existential closeness to Him, where all aspects of himself have completely submitted to the Divine will. A saint is not only pious according to the Shari'a but has also achieved haqīqah and ma'rifah.

He distinguished between *'ālim* and *'wali (guardian)*: a *'ālim* may know the laws of sharia, but he is not necessarily a *guardian* if his soul is not yet pure from ego and worldliness. Conversely, a *guardian* is not only knowledgeable but also has renounced all worldly attachments. Sheikh al-Jailani stated that a wali is given spiritual gifts

(*karāmah*), but that is not the goal. Karāmah is a consequence, not the goal, of sainthood.

In Islamic treasury, we often hear the words "guardian" mentioned, which are often interpreted as people who are attached to karamah or sacredness. In his work, *Ar-Risalah Al-Qusyairiyyah*, Abul Qasim Al-Qusyairiyyah, he elaborated on the concept of wali. He mentioned two possible meanings of the word. The word "guardian" can be interpreted as a *mubalaghah* (religious guidance) or wazan fa'īl (faithful guidance), with the meaning maf'ūl (instructive guidance).

He said, "If asked, 'What is the meaning of guardian?' "Then the answer is, it has two possibilities. First, the word guardian follows the wazan '*fa'īl'* as *mubalaghah* from *fā'il*, a kind of superlative (very) meaning, like '*alīm, 'qadīr*, and the like so that the meaning of wali is a person whose obedience is continuous without being harmed by immorality,"(Abul Qasim Al-Qusyairi, 2010).

Second, the word "guardian" can also follow the *wazan "fa'īl"* with the meaning maf'ūl such as the word "*qatīl*" with the meaning "*maqtūl*" (the one who was killed) and the word "*jarīh*" with the meaning "*majrūh*" (the injured one) so that the meaning of the guardian is a person who is protected by Allah with His eternal and continuous protection and care. Allah did not create for him humiliation which is nothing but the capacity for immorality. Allah always gives him taufiq which is nothing but the ability to obey. Allah says in Surah Al-A'raf verse 196, "he protects the pious." (Abul Qasim Al-Qusyairi, 2010).
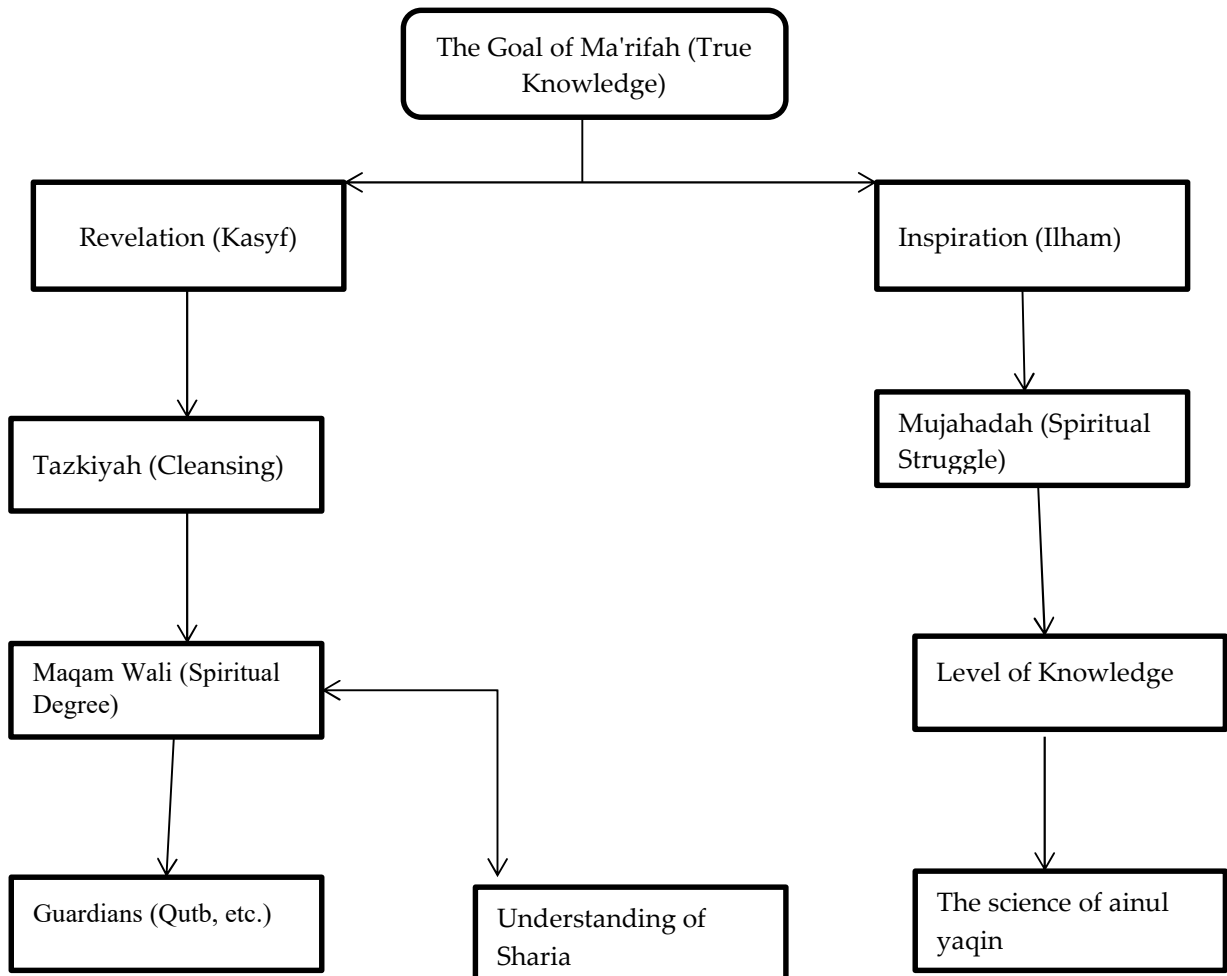
From this understanding emerged the term *mahfūzh*, or those protected by God, for the saints, one level below *ma'shum*, a type of protection granted to prophets and messengers. In general, the saints of God can be recognized, although their identity is not easy to determine. Sheikh Zarruq mentioned three main characteristics of saints. According to him, anyone who possesses these three characteristics is likely a saint of God. "But waliyullah can be recognized by three signs: putting Allah first, (his heart) turning away from His creatures, and adhering to the law of the Prophet Muhammad SAW correctly," (Zarruq, 2010).

Meanwhile, Ibn Athaillah in his book Al-Hikam stated that Allah's saints are more difficult to recognize than Allah himself. Wali Allah always leads us to Allah. Meanwhile, the guardianship itself is difficult to identify. "Glorified is Allah who does not make a sign for His saints other than a sign that shows His existence. Glory be to Allah who does not 'bring in' saints other than those whom He wishes to reach Him." Our task in this world is not to carry out a census of which people can be called guardians or not. Our main task is to worship Allah while maintaining the rights of other Muslims as servants of Allah, including husnuzzhan.

Guardianship in al-Jailani's view is also hierarchical, consisting of *abdal* (substitute guardians), *awtād* (pillars of the earth), *nujabā'* and *nuqabā'* (the leader of the

saints), and up to the highest position (Qutb, the spiritual leader of all the saints). To better understand the structure of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani's thought, the following is a systematic diagram:

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                    ┌──────────────────────────┐
                    │  The Goal of Ma'rifah    │
                    │  (True Knowledge)        │
                    └──────────────────────────┘
                                │
        ┌───────────────────────┴───────────────────────┐
        ↓                                                ↓
┌──────────────────┐                          ┌──────────────────┐
│ Revelation (Kasyf)│                         │ Inspiration (Ilham)│
└──────────────────┘                          └──────────────────┘
        │                                              │
        ↓                                              ↓
┌──────────────────┐                          ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Tazkiyah          │                         │ Mujahadah (Spiritual │
│ (Cleansing)       │                         │ Struggle)            │
└──────────────────┘                          └──────────────────────┘
        │                                              │
        ↓                                              ↓
┌──────────────────┐                          ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Maqam Wali        │◄──────────┐             │ Level of Knowledge   │
│ (Spiritual Degree)│           │             └──────────────────────┘
└──────────────────┘           │                        │
        │                      │                         ↓
        ↓                      │             ┌──────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐ │ The science of ainul │
│ Guardians         │   │ Understanding of │ │ yaqin                │
│ (Qutb, etc.)      │   │ Sharia           │ └──────────────────────┘
└──────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘
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**Implications of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani's Thoughts in the Treasures of Modern Islam**

The thoughts of Sheikh Abdul al-Jailani remain highly relevant to contemporary Islamic thought. Amidst the strong currents of secularism, materialism, and existential crises in the modern world, al-Jailani's Sufism epistemology offers a spiritualistic and transcendental model of knowledge. First, his epistemological approach encourages the integration of reason and intuition in attaining truth.(Al-Jailani, nd-b). In the context of modern Islamic education and science, this is an important foundation for building an integrative scientific model, not merely rationalistic, but also transcendent and oriented towards self-purification (Harun Nasution, 1995). Second, the concept of sainthood offers a spiritual role model amidst a

moral and exemplary crisis. The saint's leadership model—based on piety, sincerity, and spiritual depth—is highly relevant for building a highly ethical society in an era of globalized values. Third, al-Jailani symbolizes that Islam is a spiritual religion that touches the deepest dimensions of humankind. His legacy of thought serves not only as a historical artifact but also as an ethical and philosophical foundation for Muslims who aspire to rebuild a civilization that is not only materially advanced but also spiritually sublime.

**Conclusion**

From this explanation, it can be concluded thatSheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani was one of the great figures in the Sufi tradition who made profound contributions to the development of Islamic epistemology. His thoughts on the levels of knowledge, *'Ilm al-Yaqīn*, *'Ayn al-Yaqīn*, and *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn*, shows the existence of an epistemological hierarchy that does not only rely on reason and text, but alsoinvolves inner witnessing and spiritual experiencedirectly. This enriches the concept of Islamic knowledge, which is not merely rational-empirical but also transcendental and intuitive.

The concept of sainthood in al-Jailani's thinking does not just concern spiritual status, but rathercontains aspects of moral, social and spiritual leadership development which is highly contextual for the lives of people in the modern era. In the current context, his thoughts inspire: the development of Islamic education based on inner transformation and values, the strengthening of spirituality in the face of the global moral crisis, the integration of knowledge and faith in the development of modern Islamic scholarship, and the realization of leadership based on prophetic values.

Thus, Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani's thoughts are not only historically important, but alsohas strategic value in building a paradigm of Islamic science and spirituality that is relevant to the challenges of the times.**.**

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