

The Dalā'il al-Khayrāt: A Landmark in Devotional Literature

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Within the vast ocean of Islamic literature, few works have permeated the daily lives of Muslims across continents, cultures and centuries, like the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* of Imām Muhammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 870 AH/1465 CE). More than a compilation of prayers for the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, it is a testament to a love so profound that it reshaped the entire spiritual landscape of the Muslim world, offering a unique response to the crises of its time and ours.

While scholars before him, like Qādī 'Iyād in his al-Shifā or contemporaries like al-Firūzābādī (d. 817 AH/1415 CE) and al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH/1497 CE), who authored magnificent works on the status of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the virtues of praying for him, their works were primarily for academia. Imām al-Jazūlī's genius lay in his revolutionary approach; he created the first dedicated prayer book for the masses. He did not write a dense theological treatise filled with citations, but a living, breathing manual of prayers designed for every ordinary Muslim, student and scholar.

The Alchemy of Its Composition

There is no doubt that the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* was, up to a few decades ago, the most circulated book in the Muslim world. So, what lies behind its unparalleled popularity? The secret is an alchemical blend of qualities, masterfully woven into a single text. At its foundation, it is a book of *salawāt*, i.e. prayers; every line an invocation of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ, fulfilling a divine command to honour the Prophet and send God's blessings to him, and drawing immense spiritual reward. Yet it is also at the same time a book of *du'ā*, for through these very calls for blessings the reader prays for salvation, relief from poverty, protection from enemies and success in this life and the next. In this way, it truly lives up to its name: a guide to goodness.

But the *Dalā'il* is more than a prayer book. Imām al-Jazūlī poured his soul into its prose, turning it

into what can only be described as an encyclopaedia of love for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Within it, he included 201 of the Prophet's names, a number corresponding to the numerological value of one of God's Names, *al-Nāfi'* (The Creator of Good), subtly pointing to the immense benefit of this practice. This selection became so renowned that it was engraved on the front walls of the Holy Mosque of Medina in front of the shrine of the Prophet ﷺ. Alongside this, the text serves as a theological primer: woven into its eloquent invocations are the core tenets of Sunni creed, presented in a way that is accessible to all, without the need for formal study.

Perhaps most strikingly, the *Dalā'il* has also been regarded as a guide in itself. It is often said that for the one without a spiritual master, the *Dalā'il* takes the role of master. Its verses work quietly upon the heart, purifying it, treating its ailments, and cultivating the soul until it is ready for the ultimate gift: a vivid vision of the Prophet ﷺ in this life.

The Dalā'il in Muslim Life

The impact of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* extended far beyond the sphere of personal devotion. It reshaped the rhythm of Muslim society; merchants recited it in their shops before opening for trade, travellers carried it across seas and deserts for protection, and families gathered around it in their homes as a source of blessing. Its verses echoed in mosques, *zawāyā* and market-places alike, weaving a shared fabric of remembrance that transcended geography and language. The book became not just a manual of prayer, but a cultural anchor, a way of reaffirming identity and belonging in turbulent times. Its influence on manuscript culture, devotional art, and communal rituals ensured that it was not merely read but lived, binding communities together in collective love for the Prophet ﷺ.

A Response to Crisis, A Call to Resilience

The *Dalā'il* was not born in a vacuum. Imām al-Jazūlī lived during an era of profound crisis. Islamic rule in



Andalusia was on the verge of collapse, Portuguese crusaders were attacking and occupying coastal cities of North Africa, and campaigns to distort the image of the Prophet ﷺ were rampant.

In this climate, the Muslim response was not merely military; it was cultural and spiritual. As others had done through poetry (like Imām al-Būsīrī's *Burda*), Imām al-Jazūlī chose prose. His method was powerful in its simplicity: They slander him, we praise him. The *Dalā'il* was a weapon of love deployed to strengthen the Muslim community's attachment to its source of guidance and grace, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It was understood that a community that honours its Prophet ﷺ is a community endowed with honour ('izzah), resilience and ultimate victory.

The Miracle of a Woman and the Rise of a Legacy

The inspiration for the book is itself a glimpse into the unseen world that Imām al-Jazūlī frequented. The famous account tells of him, a renowned scholar, unable to draw water from a well for ablution. A young woman, a hidden saint, looked down and remarked, "You are a man of praiseworthy qualities but still you cannot find a way to draw water from a well!" She then spat into the well, causing water to rise to the top.

Astonished, Imām al-Jazūlī asked her by what means she achieved this level of spiritual power. She replied, "By invoking blessings for the Prophet ﷺ, the one who was obeyed by animals when he travelled in the wilderness." When he asked for the specific prayer she used, she instructed him instead to compile a book of such prayers. He did so, and upon presenting it to her, she confirmed that her invocation was within it. This miraculous encounter underscores a central theme; true spiritual power is accessed through love for the Prophet ﷺ.

From that moment, the *Dalā'il* became a spiritual treasure. Imām al-Jazūlī himself recited it three times daily during his fourteen-year retreat. His 13,000 disciples in the *Shādhilī* order adopted it as a daily practice. Soon after his death, it transcended its Moroccan borders, with dedicated masters (*Shaykh al-Dalā'il*) appointed in the holy mosques of Mecca, Medina, Cairo, and Istanbul. Wealthy patrons endowed funds in their wills to ensure its perpetual recitation. Master calligraphers from Türkiye to Indonesia vied to produce the most beautiful manuscripts, transforming the book into a supreme art form.

A Living Testament for a Modern Ummah

Today, the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* remains as relevant as ever. In an age where the Prophet ﷺ is again subject to slander, with Muslims facing myriad challenges, it offers a timeless blueprint for response. It teaches us that defence is not only manifested in protest but in profound, consistent and beautiful devotion.

It calls the *Ummah* back to its heart; to love what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ love. It is a means of cultivating that love personally and collectively, promising spiritual prosperity, relief from difficulties, and, most importantly, a strengthened connection to the Source of all Goodness ﷺ.

The *Dalā'il* is more than a book; it is a journey and a guide for every Muslim seeking to navigate the wilderness of the modern world, with the light of the Chosen One ﷺ illuminating their path.

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