

THE COMPASSIONATE WARRIOR — WISDOM TALES DISCUSSION GUIDE

SUMMARY

- Engaging and easy to read, this riveting and timely biography of the Emir Abd el-Kader (1807-1883) shows how he heroically led the Algerian defense of his homeland against French colonialism for over a decade
- *The New York Times* called Abd el-Kader “one of the few great men of the [19th] century”
- He was a brilliant military strategist, superb horseman, statesman, philosopher, and renowned Arab and Muslim spiritual leader—an international celebrity in his own time
- In 1860 Abd el-Kader rescued over 10,000 Christians in Syria from mob violence
- He won acclaim from Abraham Lincoln, Pope Pius IX, and Napoleon III
- A major motion picture about Abd el-Kader is in production

ABOUT THE BOOK

A gifted writer and serious researcher, Marston has created an exciting and compelling story which highlights the rich aspects of Algerian history, culture, and religion while providing the realities surrounding French colonialism. Abd El-Kader fought hard against colonial occupation, and as a pioneer in interfaith dialogue, he also fought hard against intolerance, embodying the Sufi virtues of nobility, generosity, and kindness towards one’s enemies. Although he endured betrayal and imprisonment, he manifested compassion, interreligious tolerance, and human decency, even in extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

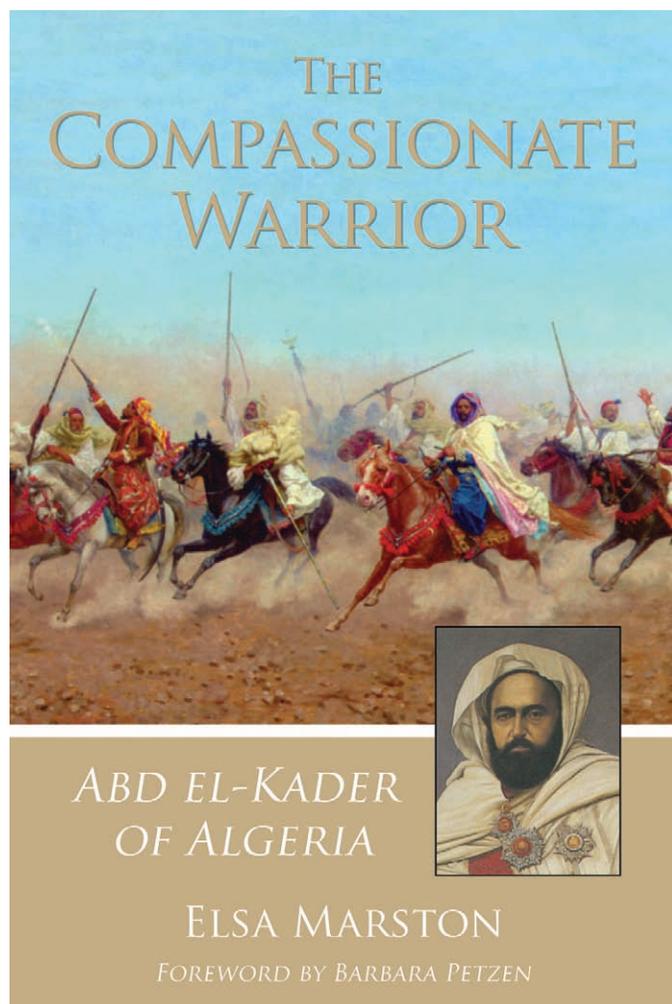
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ELSA MARSTON is the award-winning author of over a dozen books of fiction and non-fiction for children and young adults. She attended Harvard, the American University of Beirut, and Indiana University. She has lived in Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia and has traveled extensively throughout the Middle East. She currently lives in Bloomington, Indiana.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE FOREWORD

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16 color and black-and-white Illustrations
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Winner of the 2013 Middle East Book Award
for best “Youth Nonfiction”
Finalist in the “Multicultural Non-Fiction” category of
The USA “Best Books 2013” Awards
Eric Hoffer Book Award Grand Prize Finalist & 1st
Runner-Up in “Culture” category

“Featuring lavish illustrations with photos and portraits, Marston’s lively twelve-chapter biography is enhanced with notes, a glossary, and a timeline of el-Kader’s life. While simple and aimed at a middle-school audience, the prose is lively, colorful and at times quite exciting.”

—Fore Word Reviews

Wisdom Tales
Stories from Around the World

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1. Throughout the 19th century, Abd el-Kader was described in many ways: nationalist, Algerian patriot, Muslim fanatic, theocrat, fundamentalist, social/political revolutionary, hero, exotic Arab chieftain, desert hawk, etc. How would you describe him?

2. If the Algerians had been successful in resisting the French conquest, what might have happened? Return of Ottoman control? Decline into tribal warfare? Or could Abd el-Kader have established his state?

3. Some French leaders believed in a “civilizing mission.” Does this make sense to you? Could Abd el-Kader have achieved some of the possible benefits of colonial rule (law and order, education, economic development, etc.), if given the chance?

4. Abd el-Kader and his father hated Ottoman rule—the outsiders who ruled only for their own benefit, keeping the great majority of people suppressed. So, in trying to build his own state, why didn’t Abd el-Kader aim for a more united society and democratic system of government?

5. Since Abd el-Kader did not want to demonstrate his power by means of extravagance, luxurious lifestyle, and other ways of asserting personal superiority over others, how *did* he win the support of the tribes?

6. The way Abd el-Kader and the French *worked together* for some years (under the treaties with Desmichelles and Bugeaud) is a surprising development in the Emir’s resistance campaign. Would you say this suggests opportunism, or possibly even betrayal of his people? Or how might you describe his reasoning in these situations?

7. When Abd el-Kader had the chance to work with other popular resistance fighters, especially “Bou Maza,” it seems he didn’t take advantage of the opportunity. Was this wise, in your view, or a strategic mistake?

8. The French (military, government, and public) had mixed views of Abd el-Kader: some admired him, some regarded him as “savage, a monster.” If you were one of the Emir’s right-hand men, how would you advise him to handle his “public relations”?

9. Was it really necessary—or a waste of manpower, resources, and time—for the Emir to attack Tijani, the powerful man with a fortress deep in the Sahara desert?

10. Do you think you could have reacted as Abd el-Kader did when Léon Roches revealed that he had deceived the Emir and had not, in fact, converted to Islam? Does it seem to you that Abd el-Kader may sometimes have trusted other people, especially his adversaries, a little too readily?

11. Did Abd el-Kader give up his war of resistance too easily? Should he have kept on fighting?

12. How would you explain the way Abd el-Kader—in spite of everything bad the French did to him, his people, and country—came to admire his former enemies and their civilization so much? What do you think of his loyalty to Napoleon III?

13. When he arrived in Damascus, would it have been better if Abd el-Kader had tried to fit in with the local religious leaders, even if he wasn’t favorably impressed by them?

14. After the riots of 1860, would it have been wise of Abd el-Kader to say that he saved the Christians *primarily* to show good will for Christians and Christianity? What do you think of his actual explanation?

15. What might Abd el-Kader—who felt that God wanted humankind to benefit from technological progress—think about the technological advances of our time (computers, space exploration, nuclear war, you name it!)?

16. Judging from the recent books about Abd el-Kader, it appears that he did not take much interest in improving the lives of women. Do you think that’s a fair conclusion? If so, how would you explain it?

17. What do you suppose Abd el-Kader would think of the rise of extremist Islamic groups today?

18. Which do you think would be the most effective way(s) to counter religious extremism: To publicly argue against it? To show how extremist leaders can actually weaken the religion they promote? To emphasize education of the people (i.e., not indoctrination)? To live a quiet but good life, i.e., to try always to be a good Muslim, Christian, Jew, etc., and influence people by being a model of one’s beliefs?

19. Abd el-Kader, a devout Muslim, has been called an “interfaith bridge-builder.” How would you explain his efforts to find common ground, understanding, and acceptance among religions, especially Islam and Christianity? In your view, why do so many people still resist efforts toward interfaith harmony?

20. How do you think Abd el-Kader’s attitudes and beliefs on many things—such as interfaith dialogue, compassion toward others including the enemy, open-mindedness regarding other ideas and cultures—can be applied today?

