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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ḤAKĪM AL-TIRMIDHĪ'S DISTINCTIVE APPROACH TO THE CLASSIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN HIS WORK "AL-AMTHĀL"

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Abstract. *The article examines the distinctive approach to the classification of knowledge set out by Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in his work al-Amthāl min al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah. It is shown that the scholar assesses knowledge not by the field to which it belongs but by the outcome it produces in a person's heart, character and conduct. On the basis of a narration distinguishing knowledge of the heart from knowledge of the tongue, and of verse 32 of Sūrat Fāṭir, the article analyses the division of knowledge into beneficial and harmful, and then the four relative levels at which inherently beneficial knowledge manifests itself according to two criteria – acting upon knowledge and teaching it to others. The parables through which Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī expounds these ideas are examined, together with the ethical and philosophical significance of the classification and its relevance for contemporary education.*

Keywords: *Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, al-Amthāl min al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah, classification of knowledge, beneficial knowledge, knowledge of the heart, parable, ethics, acting upon knowledge, teaching, education.*

INTRODUCTION

In classifying knowledge, attention is usually paid to what a person studies, which sources they rely on and which methods they employ. However, another important question arises when knowledge is assessed: does a person act upon what they have learned, and does that knowledge benefit others? The first approach identifies the field of knowledge, whereas the second considers its practical outcomes. Merely describing knowledge as religious or secular therefore does not determine how beneficial it is.

In his work al-Amthāl, Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī places particular emphasis on the outcomes of knowledge in human life. Through instructive parables he explains how knowledge affects the heart, manifests itself in moral conduct, is confirmed through action and is conveyed to others. On this basis the division of knowledge into beneficial and harmful types is examined, followed by an analysis of the four relative levels at

which knowledge that is inherently beneficial manifests itself, depending on a person's conduct and relationship to teaching.

MAIN PART

When discussing how knowledge may be beneficial or may serve as evidence against its possessor, Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī cites the following narration:

العلم علمان: علم في القلب، فذاك العلم النافع، وعلم في اللسان، فذاك حجة الله تعالى على ابن آدم

"Knowledge is of two kinds: knowledge in the heart, which is beneficial knowledge, and knowledge on the tongue, which is Allah the Exalted's evidence against the son of Adam" (Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, 1975:217). This narration initially distinguishes two kinds of knowledge: beneficial knowledge established in the heart, and knowledge that remains on the tongue and may become evidence against its possessor. Knowledge of the heart refers not simply to information retained in memory but to knowledge manifested in a person's character and actions, whereas knowledge on the tongue remains merely verbal and does not become integrated into its possessor's conduct and character. Here "harmful" does not imply that the content of the knowledge is bad; rather, it means that the possessor's attitude towards that knowledge may lead to adverse consequences.

Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī relates this idea to verse 32 of Sūrat Fāṭir, which refers to those who wrong themselves, those who follow a moderate course and those who excel in good deeds:

ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ وَمِنْهُم مُّقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ

The verse means: "Then We caused those of Our servants whom We chose to inherit the Book. Among them are those who wrong themselves, those who are moderate, and those who, by Allah's permission, are foremost in good deeds. That is the great bounty" (Muḥammad Ṣādiq Muḥammad Yūsuf, 2007:V/62). The scholar likens someone who acts upon their knowledge to those who excel in good deeds, whereas someone who fails to act upon what they know is compared to the person who wrongs himself in the verse.

This classification does not mean that religious knowledge is beneficial while secular knowledge is harmful. Medicine serves to protect human health and to treat illness, while the natural and exact sciences help to develop human intellectual capacities. What matters is the purpose for which such knowledge is applied and the extent to which its possessor recognises their responsibility.

Having distinguished beneficial from harmful knowledge in al-Amthāl min al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah, Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī illustrates the relative nature of the benefit derived from knowledge through several parables. According to this approach, even beneficial knowledge does not produce the same results in every person's life. One person acts upon what they know and teaches it to others; another acts upon their knowledge but does not teach it; a third teaches others but does not act upon it personally; a fourth neither acts upon nor teaches their knowledge. The classification is thus based on two criteria – acting upon knowledge and teaching it to others – and whether these criteria occur together or separately determines four relative levels of benefit, which Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī expounds through instructive examples (Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, 1975:286-287).

The first is the example of a person who acquires knowledge, acts upon it and teaches it to others. In this case knowledge benefits both its possessor and other people: the person's actions confirm their knowledge, while teaching allows a wider circle of people to benefit from it. In this sense this is the first and most complete level of the beneficial application of knowledge.

The second is the example of a person who acquires knowledge and acts upon it but does not teach it to others. Such a person applies what they know in their own life, and their knowledge positively influences their character and actions; because they do not teach, however, the opportunity for others to receive this knowledge directly is limited. In addition to receiving a reward for their deeds, the possessor of knowledge may also serve as an example to others. Nevertheless, this type belongs to the second level, since the personal benefit of knowledge is more evident here.

The third is the example of a person who acquires knowledge and teaches it to others without acting upon it personally. In this case the individual conveys knowledge that they themselves do not put into practice; although they do not personally benefit from it, other people may benefit, and in this sense its relative degree of benefit is considered the third level.

The fourth is the example of a person who acquires knowledge but neither acts upon it nor teaches it to others. This is the lowest relative level: the person possesses beneficial knowledge but does not apply it to their own character or conduct, nor do they share it with others, so that neither the personal nor the educational benefit of knowledge

is realised. The knowledge itself nevertheless remains inherently beneficial; but if a person knowingly fails to act upon it, that knowledge may become evidence against its possessor. The division of beneficial knowledge into four relative categories reveals an important distinctive feature of Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's approach, since it encourages a positive attitude towards knowledge and towards those who possess it, whoever the individual concerned may be.

An important feature of this classification is that it distinguishes the intrinsic benefit of knowledge from the way in which that benefit manifests itself in human life. Knowing a great deal about morality does not in itself make a person moral: knowledge must be put into practice, and teaching it correctly to others further extends its benefits. Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī does not confine these ideas to abstract definitions but explains them through practical parables. He likens knowledge to water: just as water gives life to the earth, knowledge revives the heart, while acting upon knowledge strengthens it. It is no coincidence that the work compares the scholar to a spring, to a perfumer and to a guiding star (Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, 1975:31-46). These parables show that a scholar's knowledge should not remain merely a personal achievement but should also benefit others.

This perspective remains important for contemporary education. The fact that a student remembers information, or that a teacher explains it, does not mean that the full potential benefit of knowledge has been realised. It also matters how acquired knowledge influences a person's conduct, their professional responsibility and the lives of others; in particular, a teacher's practice of what they teach strengthens trust in their words.

CONCLUSION

An examination of attitudes towards knowledge in Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's al-Amthāl shows that knowing the field to which knowledge belongs is not sufficient to assess its benefit. In the narration cited by the scholar, knowledge is first distinguished into two types: beneficial knowledge residing in the heart, and knowledge remaining on the tongue that may serve as evidence against its possessor. This distinction depends not on whether knowledge is religious or secular but on the outcomes it produces in a person's character and actions. Accordingly, four relative levels of inherently beneficial knowledge may be identified. Someone who acts upon knowledge and teaches it to others demonstrates two kinds of benefit; for someone who acts upon knowledge without teaching it, the

personal benefit predominates; the knowledge of someone who teaches others without acting upon it may benefit students but does not bring its possessor genuine benefit; and a person who neither acts upon knowledge nor teaches it fails to make use of either opportunity.

Even knowledge that is inherently beneficial to individuals and to society may therefore lead to harmful consequences for its possessor if it is not applied properly, does not influence the possessor's character and does not serve to educate others. This does not mean that the nature of the knowledge itself has deteriorated; rather, because the person fails to act upon the truth they know, that very knowledge becomes evidence against them. This is precisely what distinguishes Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's approach: the benefit of knowledge is manifested, above all, in its possessor's character, in their practice of it and in their transmission of it to others.

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