

THE ELUCIDATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MA'RIFAT IN THE VIEWS OF HAKIM AL-TIRMIZI

Abstract. *This article is devoted to the life and scholarly legacy of the great 9th-century Islamic thinker Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ali Hakim Tirmidhi, as well as his Sufi and ma'rifah (gnostic) teachings. The author emphasizes that Termizi was not only a renowned hadith scholar and expert in Hanafi jurisprudence, but also one of the founders of Islamic philosophy and Sufi knowledge. The article examines his scholarly journeys, interactions with prominent Sufis, and his concept of ma'rifah, articulated through three fundamental principles: truth, justice, and honesty. Termizi asserts that honesty is the central element of ma'rifah and spiritual life, while truth and justice are its external manifestations. Special attention is given to the distinction between natural intellect and the intellect of faith, as well as understanding true ma'rifah through iman and basira. The article highlights the relevance of Termidhi's teachings for spiritual and moral development, emphasizing their practical application in human life.*

Keywords: *Hakim Termidhi, ma'rifah, sufism, truth, justice, honesty*

INTRODUCTION

Among the great thinkers who made a significant contribution to the civilization of the Islamic world, Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ali al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi holds a special place. Living and working in the 9th century, he was not only a prominent scholar of hadith but also one of the founders of the philosophy of wisdom and Sufism. His rich scholarly legacy earned him the honorable title of "Sultan of the Wise" during his lifetime, and even today it serves as an invaluable source for spiritual and moral purification. According to al-Tirmidhi's teachings, true enlightenment is manifested through truth, justice, and honesty embodied in actions, the heart, and the intellect. This triad serves

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as a central criterion in all aspects of human morality, belief, and life. Muhammad ibn Ali al-Tirmidhi was born in the first decade of the 9th century into a family of renowned hadith scholars. His family traces its lineage to one of the Arab tribes that settled in Iran during the Arab military expansions. Al-Tirmidhi devoted his youth to studying hadith and Hanafi jurisprudence. At the age of 27, he set out to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. Along the way, he visited Kufa, Baghdad, and Basra, where he engaged in collecting hadiths.

During his travels, al-Tirmidhi became acquainted not only with various Sufi treatises but also with the works of the Syrian Sufi Ahmad ibn Asim al-Antaki. He studied under several Iraqi Sufis, including Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi, Yahya al-Jalla, and Ahmad ibn Dazruya. Upon returning to Termez, he experienced a profound spiritual transformation, which led him to adopt an ascetic lifestyle and fully devote himself to piety and renunciation (al-Tirmidhi, 1925:135). The great scholar al-Tirmidhi possessed deep knowledge in both religious and secular sciences of his time. His exceptional intellect and outstanding abilities were highly praised by many scholars. Notably, prominent thinkers such as Abdurahmon Jomiy in “Nafahat al-Uns” and Alisher Navoiy in “Nasoim al-Muhabbat” mentioned him among the greatest sheikhs and included him among the foremost ranks of Sufi masters (al-Tirmidhi, 2018:7). Muhammad ibn Ali Hakim Termidhi is considered one of the scholars who paid special attention to the concept of ma’rifa (gnosis) in Sufism and revealed its true meaning. His views on ma’rifa are extensively explained in the work of Abdul Muhsin Husayniy titled “Ma’rifa According to Hakim al-Tirmidhi.” “This religion is built upon three foundations: truth, justice, and honesty. Truth is for the limbs (actions), justice is for the hearts, and honesty is for the intellect. When the deeds of a servant are placed on the scale, good deeds fall onto the scale of truth, evil deeds onto the scale of justice, and honesty becomes the tongue (pointer) of the scale. Then it becomes clear whether good outweighs evil or not

Whoever possesses these three qualities has a sign that Allah is pleased with His servant. If truth departs from actions, falsehood takes its place. If justice disappears, oppression prevails. If honesty is absent, it is replaced by falsehood. Therefore, these three—truth, justice, and honesty—are the soldiers of ma’rifa, while their opposites are the soldiers of the lower self (nafs)” (al-Husayni, 2011:171). Truthfulness is the criterion that distinguishes between good and evil, and between guidance and misguidance. It is the measure that separates truth from falsehood, and right from wrong. It serves as the primary proof that Allah sets against His servants. Therefore, it is precisely through these

three foundations—truth, justice, and honesty—that Allah calls His servants to account for their deeds, makes them witnesses against themselves, and establishes evidence against them. Among these three, the most decisive criterion is truthfulness, because it is the means of distinction, proof, and evidence. Truthfulness is the standard for judgment; truth is manifested in actions and carried out through a person's limbs, while justice is the inner measure within the human heart—that is, the scale of feelings and intentions. Thus, truth corresponds to action (the body), justice to intention (the heart), and truthfulness to consciousness and speech (the intellect). Truthfulness represents the highest stage of *ma'rifa* (gnosis). The previous two stages—truth and justice—lead to it and are united within it. Truthfulness encompasses both and governs them. For this reason, it is considered the symbol and culmination of all elements of *ma'rifa*. Allah judges His servants in this manner: He rewards good deeds according to the scale of truth and punishes evil deeds according to the scale of justice. Thus, reward is placed on the scale of truth, while punishment (retribution) is placed on the scale of justice. However, the main proof in issuing this judgment is *ma'rifa* itself, and the most essential element of *ma'rifa* is truthfulness. Therefore, truthfulness is presented here as the symbol of *ma'rifa*.

In conclusion, truth and justice are Allah's responses to human actions, while truthfulness serves as the evidence that these responses are just and rightful. Hence, on the Day of Judgment, people will be held accountable according to their level of knowledge and understanding—that is, their *ma'rifa*. And the highest point of this measure of knowledge is truthfulness.

Muhammad ibn Ali Hakim Termidhi explains that the three qualities mentioned above—truth, justice, and truthfulness—are manifested in the deeds of human beings. For actions to be correct, complete, and perfect, they must necessarily contain these three fundamental elements: truth, justice, and honesty. If truth is absent from an action, it is overtaken by falsehood. If justice is missing, it is replaced by oppression. If truthfulness is lacking, it is replaced by falsehood (al-Husayni, 2011:173). Thus, any action that is not grounded in truth, justice, and honesty is incomplete. The absence of any one of these elements results in a corresponding deficiency in the action. Al-Tirmidhi further explains these three elements within the framework of ethics. "Not only actions, but also a person's character, virtues, and spiritual qualities must embody these three elements. If these three—truth, justice, and honesty—are united within a person, it is as if that individual were created with these qualities. They become intrinsic traits of human nature. However, these qualities vary among individuals. The stronger these qualities are in a person, the

more perfect their character becomes; consequently, they attain greater ma'rifa (gnosis), and their actions become more correct" (al-Husayni, 2011:174). These statements of al-Tirmidhi demonstrate that ma'rifa is not merely theoretical, but has a practical and ethical foundation. Truth, justice, and honesty must be present in all aspects of human life—intellectual, practical, and moral. Without this triad, a person's actions, character, and knowledge remain incomplete, weak, or corrupted. Al-Tirmidhi describes truth, justice, and honesty not only as the foundation of actions and ethics, but also as the basis of correct belief. "The three elements mentioned above—truth, justice, and honesty—together constitute the soldiers of ma'rifa (knowledge), while their opposites are the soldiers of the lower self (nafs). Only when these three are fully realized does true ma'rifa emerge. Likewise, guidance, awareness, and sound thinking arise only when these elements are united. If belief lacks any one of these elements, it deviates from the path of truth and inclines toward error and misguidance.

Therefore, these three—truth, justice, and honesty—are the fundamental components of correct belief. From such belief, actions emerge, character is formed, and it becomes aligned with human nature as well as with the divine wisdom of the universe. Moreover, this belief corresponds to the criteria of judgment on the Day of Resurrection, where every action is evaluated according to these three elements" (al-Husayni, 2011:175). Muhammad ibn Ali Hakim Termidhi emphasizes through this theory that true knowledge is not merely an intellectual concept, but a complete system of life that is aligned with human nature (fitra), internalized in ethics, reflected in actions, and firmly grounded in belief. In al-Tirmidhi's view, ma'rifa (gnosis) is not general or broad knowledge, but rather a concept with a specific and deeper meaning. To clarify this, he divides intellect into two types: natural intellect (fitri 'aql) and the intellect of faith ('aql al-iman).

The natural intellect is common to all human beings, and differences in it depend on physical constitution and natural abilities. Its source lies in sensory perception and the faculties of the body. In contrast, the intellect of faith is specific only to believers—those who affirm divine unity (tawhid). Its source is basira (inner insight), an inner light of the heart, spiritual perception, and understanding through faith. Therefore, for al-Tirmidhi, ma'rifa refers specifically to this second type of cognition—knowledge grounded in faith. The first type, natural intellect, although present in all humans, does not fall within the scope of ma'rifa. Consequently, philosophical or purely rational knowledge, if it does not serve a divine purpose, is not considered ma'rifa. In his framework, only that which

is understood through faith and inner insight is regarded as true gnosis (al-Husayni, 2011:175).

CONCLUSION

Al-Tirmidhi's vision offers a profound synthesis of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality, in which honesty (sidq) serves as the core and culmination of ma'rifa, while truth (ḥaqq) and justice ('adl) provide the practical pathways for human action. This framework underscores that genuine knowledge is not an abstract intellectual pursuit but a deeply transformative experience that shapes both character and conduct. By rooting knowledge in moral integrity and the human capacity for ethical discernment, al-Tirmidhi bridges the gap between understanding and living, showing that faith and cognition are inseparable.

Furthermore, his teachings illuminate a timeless principle: that spiritual and ethical development must advance together. In contemporary society, where knowledge is often valued for utility or status rather than virtue, al-Tirmidhi's emphasis on honesty, justice, and truth challenges us to reconsider the purpose of learning and the responsibilities it entails. His thought advocates a holistic approach in which intellectual insight, ethical commitment, and spiritual awareness mutually reinforce one another, cultivating individuals who are not only wise but also morally grounded and spiritually attuned.

Ultimately, al-Tirmidhi's approach remains relevant today because it offers a comprehensive moral compass for navigating the complexities of modern life. By emphasizing the inseparability of knowledge and action, and by highlighting the ethical and spiritual dimensions of human existence, his teachings provide guidance for personal growth, social responsibility, and the pursuit of a just and truthful society. In this sense, al-Tirmidhi's thought is not merely historical or theoretical—it is a living framework that continues to inspire and instruct those seeking to integrate intellect, ethics, and spirituality in a meaningful way.

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