

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT
AND CIVILIZATION (ISTAC)

AL - HAKIM AL - TIRMIDHI'S CONCEPTION OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC
THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION (ISTAC)
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE M.A. DEGREE

BY

ABDUL LATIF BIN ABDUL RAZAK

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

APRIL, 1999.



الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
وَدِينُنَا سَلَامٌ وَأَسْلَابُهُ إِذَا رَأَى بَنِيهَا وَوَلَدِيهَا

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

To

my mother, Siti Aishah Ahmad,

my father, Abdul Razak Musa,

my wife, Hafizah Ali,

and my son, Nu'man Hakim.

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List of Abbreviations

A 'dā'	Al-Tirmidhī, <i>Al-A 'dā' wa al-Nafs wa al-'Aql wa al-Hawā.</i>
Amthāl	Al-Tirmidhī, <i>Al-Amthāl min al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah.</i>
AP	Duke, <i>Abnormal Psychology.</i>
Bayān	Al-Tirmidhī, <i>Bayān al-Farq Bayn al-Ṣadr wa al-Qalb wa al-Fū'ād wa al-Lubb.</i>
BS	Al-Tirmidhī, <i>Budū Shān al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.</i>
EI	<i>First Encyclopedia of Islam.</i>
GDS	Winter, <i>Al-Ghazālī on Disciplining the Soul</i>
HTID	Abdullah, <i>Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī wa Ittijāhuha al-Dhawqīyyah.</i>
HTWT	Al-Geyoushi, <i>Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī: His Works and Thoughts</i>
Iḥyā'	Al-Ghazālī, <i>Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn</i>
ITST	Al-Geyoushi, <i>The Influence of al-Tirmidhi on Sufi Thought</i>
Khatm	Al-Tirmidhī, <i>Khatm al-Awliyā'.</i>
LWHT	Qasim, <i>Life and Works of Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.</i>
MHU	Al-Sharqāwī, <i>Min Ḥukamā' al-Ummah</i>
Manāzil	Al-Tirmidhī, <i>Manāzil al-'Ibād min al-'Ibādah.</i>
NM	Al-Attas, <i>The Nature of Man and The Psychology of Human Soul</i>
Nawādir	Al-Tirmidhī, <i>Nawādir al-'Uṣūl fī Ma'rīfat Ahādith al-Rasūl.</i>
Prologomena	Al-Attas, <i>Prologomena to the Metaphysics of Islam</i>
Q	Al-Makkī, <i>Qūt al-Qulūb fī Mu'ālat al-Maḥjūb</i>
Ri'āyah	Al-Muḥāsibī, <i>Al-Ri'āyat li Ḥuqūq Allāh</i>
Riyāḍah	Al-Tirmidhī, <i>Al-Riyāḍah wa Adab al-Nafs</i>

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TCAI

Al-Geyoushi, *Tirmidhi's Conception of The Areas of Interiority*

TCSBQN

Al-Geyoushi, *Al-Tirmidhi's Conception of the Struggle Between Qalb and Nafs*

TTG

Al-Geyoushi, *Al-Tirmidhi's Theory of Gnosis*

ABSTRACT

The main objective of my dissertation is to present one of our great scholars, al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhī's conception of psychology and to compare his contributions with those of other early Muslim scholars and modern western psychologists. For the above purpose, the dissertation will be organized into four chapters.

The introductory chapter presents a historical background of al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhī including his early education, works and major contributions, thoughts as well as his influence on later Muslim scholars and laymen. The principles upon which he based his studies and how he derived his theories will also be highlighted in this chapter. The first chapter, which is the backbone of my dissertation, concentrates on al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhī's conception of the human psyche. The way he understood, interpreted and elaborated Qur'anic terminology such *Qalb*, *Ṣadr*, *Fū'ād*, *Lubb*, *Rūḥ*, *Nafs*, *Hawā*, *Shahwah*, and *'Aql* will be expounded. Since this terminology comprises key-terms essential to an understanding of psychology from a Muslim point of view, our analysis of al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhī's usage of these terms will enable us to discern how this great Muslim intellectual conceived and described the "human psyche."

While chapter one deals with al-Tirmidhī's conception of the human psyche, chapter two will concentrate on a more specific problem: his conception of the source of good and evil forces, the constant war between the two, its consequences on man, namely Psycho-spiritual illnesses and their treatment.

In chapter three, I will try to compare al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhī's psychological concepts with western psychology in several areas like learning and perception. Al-Tirmidhī's conception of extrasensory perception will also be discussed in this particular chapter.

After all of the above mentioned points have been clarified, I will submit my conclusion on al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhī's understanding of the human psyche. It is my hope

that this dissertation will provide a clear understanding of al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi's own conception of the human psyche, which can enlighten further research on the Qur'anic concept of man to form a solid and complete foundation of Islamic Psychology.

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AL-ḤAKĪM AL-TIRMIDHĪ

1. His Life Experiences and Early Education

Before discussing al-Tirmidhī's conception of the human psyche, it will be expedient to discuss first his life, works, influence, and his methodology. This discussion, however, is not a mere representation of al-Tirmidhī's biography as done by many other authors, but it is indeed an attempt by the author to delineate the psychological and socio-cultural aspects that had influenced al-Tirmidhī in the achievement of his scholarly and spiritual greatness.

His full name is Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad Ibn 'Alī al-Tirmidhī, better known as al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī. He was a sunni theologian, a muḥaddith, a jurist,¹ and one of the great *ṣūfī* leaders of the third century A.H.² He was born in Tirmidh,³ on the river Oxus in Transoxania. However, the exact dates of his birth and death are not known. Not even an approximate mention of his birthdate can be found. With respect to his death, Ḥājī Khalifah, the author of *Kashf al-Zunūn* states that al-Tirmidhī died in 255 A.H./ 869 A.C.;⁴ L. Massignon, in 285/ 898;⁵ and Ibn Ḥajar, in 318/ 930.⁶ In addition to these three dates, there are many other dates given by various authorities and the difference between them can be as much as 65 years.⁷ Considering all the given dates, we may simply agree with Yahya, the editor of al-Tirmidhī's *Khatm al-Awliyā'* that al-Tirmidhī was born at the beginning of the third century and died at the end of the same century.⁸

¹ L. Massignon, "Tirmidhi," *First Encyclopedia of Islām*, 8 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 8: 797, hereafter abbreviated as *EI*.

² Dr. Muhammad Ibraheem al-Geyoushi, "Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī: His Works and Thoughts," *The Islamic Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1970): 159, hereafter identified as *HTWT*.

³ Tirmidh is another city besides Balkh which is located in the province of Khurasān

⁴ *Kashf al-Zunūn 'an Asāmi al-Kutub wa al-Funūn* (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Bahiyah, 1941), 1: 938 & 2: 1418.

⁵ *EI*, 8: 797.

⁶ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Lisān al-Mizān*, 7 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Ālamī, 1986), 5:308.

⁷ *HTWT*, 163.

⁸ Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Khatm al-Awliyā'*, ed. with a general introduction by Dr. Uthman Yahya (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1965), 9, hereafter cited as *Khatm*.

It is beyond doubt that the environment in which al-Tirmidhī was brought up was conducive to his intellectual development. The third century A.H. portrayed the age of maturity of Islamic culture and civilization. It was a century in which giants of Islamic thought in every branch of human knowledge such as religious studies, philosophy, literature and language produced distinguished contributions. Schools of thought burst out in every corner of the Islamic world, in all major cities such as Baghdād, Kufā, Baṣra, Madīna, Balkh, Nishapur, Bukharā, Tirmidh and others. Scholars and students traveled to every corner of Islamic world to drink at the fountain of knowledge and sit at the feet of the famous shaikhs. Every region had its own distinctive character. Khurasān where al-Tirmidhī was brought up for example, was the centre of *Hadīth* in which the greatest *muhaddithin* of the Islamic world such as al-Bukhārī (d. 260/ 874), Muslim (d. 261/ 875), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/ 892), Ibn Majah (d. 273/ 887), al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/ 916), and Abū Dawūd (d. 275/ 889) were born.⁹

Besides the *muhaddithin*, Khurāsān also produced many *ṣūfī* movements. Their leaders later exerted a great influence on *ṣūfī* thought. Among the *ṣūfī* movements and their leaders were the Malamatiyah, the Futuwwah of Shah al-Kirmānī (d. 310/ 922), the Sahliyah of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/ 896), and the Karramiyah of Muḥammad ibn Karrām (d. 255/ 869). Balkh, a neighboring city of Tirmidh produced a number of well-known *Ṣūfī* shaikhs, such as Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. 161/ 778) and Ḥātim al-Aṣamm (d. 237/ 851). Meanwhile, in Tirmidh, the birth place of al-Tirmidhī himself, the sects of Shī'ites, Mu'tazilites, Khārijites, Murjī'ites, and Jahmites flourished. Furthermore, that city also witnessed bitter conflicts among other Muslim groups (*mazāhib*) such as Ḥanafis and Shafi'is.¹⁰

In addition to the extensive exposure to the contemporary intellectual development, al-Tirmidhī was also blessed with good, caring, and knowledge-conscious parents. As a student of psychology, the author believes that the good example of his loving parents and their early educational upbringing were essential in giving us such a great scholar and devoted saint.

⁹ *HTWT*, 161-162.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

He was introduced to Islamic knowledge and the sciences of his time almost as soon as he attained the age of reason. His father, who was a scholar of *Ḥadīth* (*muḥaddith*) and a jurist (*faqīh*), was his first teacher. As a responsible, dedicated and knowledge-conscious guardian and teacher, his father brought him up to love knowledge and urged him to study as diligently as possible even in early childhood. While other children occupied their time with fun and leisure, al-Tirmidhī devoted his time to books and study. This is mentioned by al-Tirmidhī himself in his autobiography *Buduw Shān al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī*.¹¹ He states that, "...my career began when Allah, Blessed be His name, sent me my shaikh (father), the mercy of Allah, be upon him, when I was eight years of age. He exhorted me to learn, taught me, and urged me to seek knowledge. He continued to encourage me until study became a habit with me instead of play. I acquired the knowledge of both science of traditions ('*ilm al-āthār*) and of opinion ('*ilm al-ra'y*) in my childhood."¹²

It seems that al-Tirmidhī's mother also possessed some knowledge of *Ḥadīth* as al-Tirmidhī relates a *Ḥadīth* on her authority in his book *al-Radd 'alā al-Mu'aṭṭilah*, where his mother appears as the last link in the chain (*isnād*) on his side. Al-Tirmidhī had great love and affection for his mother. He always accomplished faithfully his duties towards her, and since he was the only child in the family, al-Tirmidhī was very much loved by her.¹³

Being brought up in this kind of a family, al-Tirmidhī grew up to be a perfectionist. He was highly motivated to be the top in mastering not only exoteric knowledge ('*ilm zāhir*) but also esoteric knowledge ('*ilm bāṭin*). His father cultivated in him the highest motivation for rational education, while his mother supplied him with love and affection i.e., a spiritual sentiment for being a future *ṣūfī*. Sometimes, however, these two aspects of yearning for exoteric knowledge cultivated by his father and the spiritual esoteric sentiment supplied by his mother conflicted with each other.

¹¹ Preface to *Khatm al-Awliyā'*, 9-12, henceforth cited as *BS*. This autobiography becomes the first hand reference with regard to his life.

¹² *BS*, 14 (*HTWT*, 165).

¹³ See Farid al-Din Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, trans. A. J. Arberry, *Memorial of the Saints* (New York: Arkana, 1990), 244, hereafter cited as *Tadhkirah*; and *HTWT*, 165.

For example, he once agreed with two of his friends to undertake an educational journey which was a normal practice in the history of Islam at that time. Unfortunately, his intention was unfulfilled since his mother was taken ill, and there was nobody else to take care of her.

Al-Tirmidhī, with a broken heart, reluctantly cancelled the educational journey due to a heart-rending appeal made by his mother not to leave her alone. His mother said to him, " Son, I am a weak woman with no one to help or support me. You are the one who looks after me. In whose care will you leave me if you go away?"¹⁴ Consequently, his friends left but he remained behind, weeping over the time he had lost and the opportunity of which he had been deprived.

As a student of psychology, the author can imagine the severe approach-avoidance conflict which al-Tirmidhī must have experienced. It was a conflict between the urge to study Islamic sciences and the sentiment and feelings of obligation towards his old mother; a conflict between his ambition for scholarship and his love for his mother and for the pleasure of God.

Some time later, he was at the cemetery, on the death of his mother, weeping on her grave and saying, " Thus have I remained behind...ignorant...dull while my fellow students will return home armed with knowledge."¹⁵ Suddenly, he saw a shaikh with a brightly shining face coming up to him and asking him why he was weeping. Al-Tirmidhī related his story and the shaikh offered to teach him. Al-Tirmidhī grasped the chance eagerly, and the shaikh taught him for three years. Eventually, he discovered that the shaikh was non but al-Khidr himself,¹⁶ peace be

¹⁴ Ibid. ; See also, Uthman Yahya, general preface to *Khatm al-Awliya'*, 10.

¹⁵ Ibid. { *HTWT*, 166}.

¹⁶ The one who is said to discover and drink the water of life (*mā' al-hayāh*). He symbolises a guiding spirit which is present and active in every age. In *Sūrah al-Kahf* verses 65 to 82, he is taken to be the one who gives Moses some object lessons in higher knowledge. See Abd Razzak al-Qashānī, *A Glossary of Sūfi's technical Term*, trans. from Arabic by Nabil Safwat (London: The Octagon Press Ltd), 1991, 126. According to al-Tirmidhī's pupil, Abū Bakr al-Warrāq, al-Khidr used to visit him every Sunday. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of The Saints*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 27.

upon him, and he knew that he had been able to avail himself of this opportunity owing to the blessings of his mother's prayers.¹⁷

However, this knowledge he received, by the grace of God, stimulated his insatiable appetite for more. So, he seized the first chance he got to further his studies. He embarked on a blessed journey to Mecca. The writer feels that he wanted to achieve two noble goals, namely to gain more knowledge and to perform Ḥajj. As if he wanted to endow himself with the expertness of Islamic science (*'ilm al-zāhir*) and spiritual blessings (*'ilm al-bāṭin*). He says that he was 27 years old at that time.¹⁸ On his way to Mecca, he passed through Iraq, where he studied *Ḥadīth* under some of its outstanding scholars, and went to Basra and Kufa to study under their renowned shaikhs. There, he stayed until the blessed month of Rajab and then proceeded to Mecca where he remained until the time for pilgrimage.

During these few months, al-Tirmidhi was fully absorbed in prayer and in invoking God's mercy. He used to wake up at dawn to proceed to *Bab al-Multazam* of the holy Ka'bah in order to submissively pray and repent, asking God to cleanse him from all worldly passions and to lead him to the blessed way of the devoted slaves. Al-Tirmidhi stated that God answered his prayers and accepted his repentance. In his own words, he said, "I asked Him near *al-Multazam* to reform me and make me disinclined to worldly life and endow me with the ability to memorize His book. I did not find anything else to ask for apart from these things."¹⁹ This pilgrimage seems to have had a profound effect on al-Tirmidhi's spiritual life, and showed him a new way to God. "I returned home after I had found myself," he enthusiastically declared,²⁰

Having acquired a considerable part of each of the different branches of Islamic sciences at that time such as *Fiqh*, *Ḥadīth*, *Tafsīr* and *'Ilm al-Kalām*, he started memorizing the Qur'an and completed it after reaching home. This was a very short period for completing this blessed task which proves his intense zeal and the Blessing

¹⁷ Ibid., 11; *HTWT*, 166; and Farid al-Din 'Attar, *Tazkirat al-Awliyā'*, edit. by Nicholson (London: Luzaq and Co., 1907), 2: 91 - 92; quoted also in Hasan Qasim, The "Life and Works of Hakim al-Tirmidhi," *Hamdard Islamicus* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 67, hereafter abbreviated as *LWHT*.

¹⁸ *BS*, 14.

¹⁹ Ibid. (*HTWT*, p. 167).

²⁰ Ibid.

of God to him. The influence which the Qur'an had on his spiritual and emotional life was such that he spent whole nights from dusk to dawn reading it. The light of the Qur'an, he said, filled him with happiness and contentment.²¹

Al-Tirmidhī, in his autobiography, *Buduw Shān*, described further what happened to him after reaching home from the pilgrimage. He, as he himself confessed, became perplexed knowing not what to do and what really God needed from him.²² He sought someone who could guide him, but he failed. During this time, he had recourse exclusively to prayers and fasting, which alone provided him with relief from the fear and anxiety by which he was obsessed until he was guided to the *ṣūfīs* (*Ahl al-Ma'rifah*) and was influenced by their discourse. This was the turning point in al-Tirmidhī's life, where he was led to *ṣūfism*.

It is of interest to mention here that al-Tirmidhī went through the same kind of psycho-spiritual difficulties which were experienced by at least two of our great scholars, al-Ghazālī and al-Muḥāsibī. Both of them acquired the exoteric knowledge (*'ilm al-zāhir*) and they became expert in it, but they were anxious, feeling discontent with what they had acquired; feeling rather depressed about their inability to reach the exalted stations of Gnosis. The description of al-Tirmidhī is very similar to that of al-Ḥarith al-Muḥāsibī whose own words run as follows:

I did not cease to consider the schisms in the community and to seek the right path... and the way to be followed, and I sought for guidance on spiritual things from the learned men.... I saw their controversies to be like a deep sea, in which many have been overwhelmed.... So I searched among these types to find myself, and I was unable to do so; therefore I betook myself to those who were rightly guided, and sought guidance from learning, and made use of meditation, and after long consideration, it was made clear to me, through the Word of God, and the Sunna of His Prophet, and the consensus of opinion of the faithful, that following after passion makes a man blind to the true path... my difficulties were increased by the lack of God-fearing guides, and I feared greatly lest death should cut short my life, through my anguish on account of the schisms among the faithful, and I exerted myself in the search for what I had not found for myself of Divine knowledge, and the All-compassionate gave me guidance from those in whom I found indications of devoted piety....²³

²¹ Ibid., 15 (*HTWT*, 167).

²² Ibid.

²³ Al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri'āyah li Huqūq Allah*, ed. Abdul Qadir Ahmad 'Atā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 19 - 20, (trans. Margaret Smith in his book, *Al-Muḥāsibī: An Early Mystic of Baghdad* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1974), 18 - 19).

Al-Ghazālī, in his autobiography *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* experienced the same feelings of perplexity and discontentment in his pursuit of knowledge of certainty. This tension was so intense that al-Ghazālī fell physically sick. He, like al-Muḥāsibī and al-Tirmidhī, was finally led to *sūfism*.²⁴

Thus, we see that the three of them had passed through some form of tension and anxiety. These experiences would resemble some of the psychological symptoms of depression and anxiety which experts speak about in modern psychiatry. This led some of the modern western scholars and orientalist to wrongly assert that such scholars were suffering from actual psychiatric disorders. For example, the orientalist, Montgomery Watt for example, has even claimed that al-Ghazālī suffered from a psychosomatic illness. Describing the condition of al-Ghazālī, he says:

... Eventually in July 1095 his (al-Ghazālī) internal struggles and perplexities resulted in what would now be regarded as a psychosomatic illness. His tongue dried up, and he was unable to lecture or even to eat. The doctors could do nothing. Relief came only when he decided to give up academic work completely and to lead the life of a *sūfi*.²⁵

However, this is definitely far from the truth. That is so because depressed persons suffer from a sickness in which they become pessimistic, hopeless and would like their lives to be terminated. Such symptoms did not occur to our three scholars. The three of them, unlike depressed patients who welcome death, were in fact afraid to die before reaching a high level of spiritual states.

The tendency of modern psychologists and psychiatrists of today in looking for the pathology and sickness makes them unable to see that the same kinds of signs and symptoms of the discontent of the heart and mind in aspiring for spiritual excellence. Externally, both a person with a sick emotional state and the one who is in full submission (*khusyu'*) to Allah may display the same external behaviour like weeping

²⁴ See al-Ghazālī's own accounts in his *al-Munqidh Min 'l-Dalāl*. Edited together with other articles by Abd al-Halim Mahmud (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d), English translation by Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1980), and Malay translation by Abdul Fatah Harun Ibrahim, *Penyelamat Dari Kesesatan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991).

²⁵ Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 88.

and sobbing, but the latter will be in a state of great emotional happiness, while the former will be in a state of great misery. Furthermore, one of the most important diagnostic symptoms of depression and anxiety is lack of motivation and retardation. This was obviously not the case with our three great scholars. They all had a strong sense of religious mission the nature of which they were not quite sure about. This is quite clear in the words of al-Tirmidhī which we have already translated: "I became perplexed knowing not what to do and what really God needs from me."²⁶

It seems to us that when Allah knows someone who sincerely desires to have a high spiritual status, He will put into his heart this sort of mysterious spiritual motivation by which he would feel discontent with what he has achieved and he will be looking for a higher spiritual station. He may not be aware of what he is looking for, but eventually Allah will lead him to the right way by which he will develop to this high spiritual level (*maqām*). We may humbly dare to even give the example of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) himself when he went to cave of Ḥirā. He was more or less in such a situation, but of course, since he is the messenger of God, the condition through which he passed and the revelation that he received thereafter were a clear and very magnificent indication by which we can take an example to people of much lower status like al-Tirmidhī, al-Ghazali, and al-Muḥāsibī.

Back to al-Tirmidhī, he was given a copy of the book of al-Anṭaki²⁷, the reading of which led him to the discipline of the self (*riyādat al-nafs*) on a very strict course. He followed this course seriously and faithfully to the extent that he even refrained from drinking river water presuming that the water was flowing over a place where wrong had been done.²⁸

He, at the same time, kept isolating himself from people and spent long hours alone in his house. He started to enjoy being alone with God and eventually frequented the desert which saved him from the preoccupations of everyday life to provide a placid

²⁶ See above, 6.

²⁷ Yahyā, the editor of al-Tirmidhī's *Khatm* suggests that the person meant here is Ahmad b. 'Āṣim (d. 215 A.H.) and the book referred to is '*Ulūm al-Mu'āmalāt*. See Yahyā's general introduction to *Khatm*, 15.

²⁸ *BS*, 15 (*HTWT*, 167).

atmosphere in which nothing distracted him from his meditations about the greatness of Allāh and His creation. The tranquillity, the loneliness or rather the "aloneness", and the vast expanse of the desert seem to have assisted him much in comprehending the secrets of the universe and to apprehend the greatness of God's creation. This seclusion provided him with more opportunities for spiritual concentration than he would have found had he lived among people, busying himself with their problems and their troubling concerns.²⁹

In due course, al-Tirmidhī found himself attracted to *ṣūfīsm*. During this period, he wanted to study astronomy, arithmetic and the measurement of time by the movement of the sun. He gave up these studies due to a vision in which he was warned to avoid such pursuits for fear that they may affect his spiritual development and take him away from nearness to God. He persevered with such self-discipline (*riyādat al-nafs*) as seclusion (*'uzlah*) and remembrance (*dhikr*), until he found that his heart felt strong and alert. He associated himself with a group of true friends (*aṣḥāb ṣidq*) to help him on his spiritual way. They met for discussions, prayers and remembrance which continued until the small hours of the morning.³⁰

The activities of al-Tirmidhī and his friends finally became known and gave rise to false accusations. It appears that he was, according to his statement, falsely accused of innovation, of claiming prophecy for himself, talking about love and corrupting people. He was denounced by the Governor of Balkh, who ordered him to stop talking about love. The accusations leveled against him caused him to undergo painful trials. Nevertheless, al-Tirmidhī put this time of trial to good use. He considered that this served only to purify his heart and to discipline and to teach him humility. He relates that he used to ramble the streets barefooted, wearing faded and worn clothes and carrying loads like a slave, something that his soul resisted doing; however, by gradual

²⁹ This period of development was beautifully documented in *Budū Shān*, 15.

³⁰ *BS*, 27; also quoted in *HTWT*, 169.

training, it eventually offered no more resistance. Thereupon, he felt the sweetness (*ḥalāwa*) of humility.³¹

Al-Tirmidhī believed strongly that Allāh, Most Gracious and Most Merciful, would never leave aside His servant who sincerely strives in His cause. Indeed, He will be always with him to guide him to the straight path. This promise can be clearly discerned when He says in the Qur'ān, "Or think ye that ye shall be abandoned, as though Allāh did not know those among you who strive" (*Sūrat al-'Ankabūt*, 29: 69), and "Those who strive in Our cause - We will certainly guide them to Our Path" (*Sūrat al-Tawbah*, 9: 16). This is what happened to al-Tirmidhī. His bitter hardship caused by bitter accusations and many other tribulations along his way to find himself was compensated when he experienced visions and dreams which showed him that he was on the right way.

Psychologically, those visions and dreams helped him a lot by giving him hope and confidence in pursuing his way.³²In fact, it must be stated that these divine visions and dreams were a supporting and compensating factor in the life of many saints and Prophets. Even our Prophet (pbuh) when he was in great sorrow in consequence of the death of his wife, Khadijah and his uncle, Abū Tālib as well as the bad reception of the people of Tā'if to his call (*da'wah*) was compensated and spiritually supported by being ascended (*mi'rāj*) to Allāh to see with his own eyes something that for sure increased his faith, gave him more confidence, and spiritual happiness to pursue his mission with unfaltering strength.

³¹ Ibid. {HTWT, 169}. This aspect of struggle against the soul (*mujāhadat al-nafs*) and discipline (*riyādah*) has a very great significance in psycho-spiritual treatment. For further detail, see below in Chapter Two.

³² There are about twenty dreams and visions. Some of them seen by al-Tirmidhī himself and by his friends, but mostly they were the dreams of his wife seen about him. See BS, 21 - 31; and HTWT, 170-171. The dreams and visions gave him confidence that he was on the right path. "True visions (*al-ru'yā al-ṣādiqah*) always happen to people with upright souls and pure hearts like al-Tirmidhī. Their visions are a promise from God that they will be able to continue on their way, and hold fast their undertaking until all obstacles are overcome. This is mentioned by the Prophet in his Hadith: 'Nothing remains of prophethood except good tidings' (*al-mubashirāt*). When the Prophet was asked, "What are the good tidings, O messenger of Allāh?" he replied: "They are the truthful vision seen by man or seen for him." See HTWT, 170; and Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhī's Buduwu Sha'n," *Islamic Studies* 4, no. 3 (September 1965): 325.

Later, when God judged that these tribulations should come to an end, al-Tirmidhī arrived at the highest point of his spiritual development. His words easily penetrated into the hearts of the people. They began arriving at his house from every nook and corner; their number increased daily until his house could no longer accommodate them, and they had to move to the mosque. Al-Tirmidhī, in describing the situation, says that all the lies and false utterances disappeared. People repented and disciples increased in number. This, al-Tirmidhī says, was the reward from God to his slave.³³

We cannot conclude this discussion of al-Tirmidhī's historical background without mentioning his teachers and disciples. Al-Geyoushi gives a long list of one hundred and seven teachers of al-Tirmidhī,³⁴ while Yahya, the editor of al-Tirmidhī's *Khatm* listed down only eighteen teachers. The difference between the two biographers is that the former included also a list of those whom al-Tirmidhī narrated the Ḥadīth from, while the latter did not.³⁵

With regard to al-Tirmidhī's disciples, it is quite surprising that this prominent figure had very few disciples compared to the great number of his teachers. They are Abū Bakr Warrāq, Abū 'Alī al-Hasan b. 'Alī al-Jūzjānī, al-Qāḍī Abū Muḥammad Yaḥyā b. Manṣūr, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Īsā, and Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. al-Haytham; six in all.³⁶ However, these are the disciples who excelled in knowledge and became famous; thousands of other disciples from the public were not recorded.

Before moving further to discuss al-Tirmidhī's works, it is worth mentioning a little bit about his family life. Realizing that his way to God was hard and full of tribulations which required great physical and spiritual support, al-Tirmidhī chose a very outstanding caring woman, who also shared the same interest in *ṣūfīsm*, to be his wife. It is indicated in his autobiography that his wife had a station (*maqām*) and she

³³ See al-Tirmidhī's own account of these happenings in his autobiography, *Budū Shān*, 20-21.

³⁴ *HTWT*, 176-179.

³⁵ Yahya, ed., *Khatm*, 33 - 34.

³⁶ *HTWT*, 182; and *LWHT*, 72.

struggled for a higher position as a *sūfī*. The encouragement he received from her and her understanding and sacrifices motivated him to accomplish his spiritual journey.

In fact, the twenty dreams documented by al-Tirmidhī in his autobiography were mostly the dreams of his wife seen about him. For example, she had a vision that he was one of the four pillars (*awtād*) and that he was one of those whose station (*maqām*) was the much-frequented house (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*).³⁷ His wife also claimed that she had a vision of a tree which she set herself the task of looking it until birds came and settled on all its branches. The branches which were dry and leafless before became green. She kept watching till the birds went up the branches to the top. There was not a single branch which did not turn green. This vision may indicate that al-Tirmidhī, in his spiritual journey, would reach the top and be one of the elects of God, those whom He mentions in the Qur'ān, "God chooses for Himself whomsoever He likes, and guides towards Him those who submit to Him" (*Sūrat al-Shūrā*, 42: 13).³⁸

These dreams which were good tidings (*mubasshirāt*) helped him in his difficult spiritual journey. This is reminiscent of the role played by *umm al-mu'minīn* (the mother of the believers), Khadijah in giving spiritual and physical support to the Prophet (pbuh) especially at the beginning of his prophethood. She is the one who consoled, blanketed him when he returned trembling from the cave of Hīrā', and continuously rendered support to his mission till the end of her life. The story of these two wives portrays the tremendous contribution of the wife, in particular, and women in general in the success of a man's life which is rarely given attention to by most of our Muslim historians.

Al-Tirmidhī and his wife were blessed with six children. It is reported that he hired a servant to help his wife to take care of their children. Al-Tirmidhī had a very unique way of expressing his anger towards his children. When his children were asked about how their father behaved when he was angry, they said, "When he is

³⁷ Al-Tirmidhī, *Khatm*, 25.

³⁸ See al-Geyoushi, "al-Tirmidhī's Theory of Saints and Sainthood", *The Islamic Quarterly* 15 no. 1 (1971): 50 - 51.

annoyed by us he becomes more kind to us, stops eating and drinking, and weeps and says, "O God, did I displease you that you made them disobedient. I repent, and you put them right!" His children, when they see this, repent so that their father will be relieved of his painful condition.³⁹

Al-Tirmidhī, in so doing, highlighted some general aspects of child rearing that can be of great help to modern Muslim child psychologists. These aspects are the avoidance of physical punishment, the inculcation of love and affection to God and parents by positive emotions, and also the instilling of the belief that any difficulty or problems that happen to the believer must be, in the final analysis, caused by his sinful behaviour.

2. His Works and Major Contributions

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī was a prolific author. He wrote many excellent books on various subjects, namely: Commentary (*Tafsīr*), Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), Theology (*ʿIlm al-Kalam*), Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), History of *ṣūfīsm*, *ṣūfī* thought, Principle of Jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*), and Psychology.⁴⁰ The corpus of his works consists of about sixty books of varying length, some of them consisting only of a few pages. Most are in manuscript form. Some of them are lost and some, as Yahya has pointed out, have been preserved by later writers, such as Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn ʿAmmar al-Badlisī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Qayyim.⁴¹ Most of his works not only gained popularity during his own life time but have survived even to this day. At present, many of his works are scattered throughout the libraries of the East and West.

Al-Tirmidhī's chief work is *Khatm al-Awliya'* (The Seal of the Saints). In this work he put forward the view that just as the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is the Seal of the Prophets, so the saints also have a Seal. Al-Tirmidhī, however, did not identify who the Seal of the saints was. This new doctrine really got him into trouble in that he was accused of the heresy of preferring saints to prophets. This misunderstanding

³⁹ LWHT, 71; also quoted Farid al-Dīn ʿAttar, *Tazkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. by Nicholson (London: Luzaq and Co., 1907), 2: 94; and HTWT, 172.

⁴⁰ HTWT, 187.

⁴¹ Yahyā, ed. *Khatm*, 38.