

HAKIM TIRMIDH'S DOCTRINE OF WILAYAH

Hasan Qasim Murad

The present paper on Ḥakīm Tirmidhī, the well-known Khurāsānī mystic of the third century of Hijrah, aims at inquiring into his ideas concerning wilāyah which, if not the most fundamental single aspect of his thought, was definitely the most significant one and later on came to typify him.¹ This is, by no means, a comprehensive study of Tirmidhī's doctrine of wilāyah in all its aspects. In fact, this is only an attempt to "reconstruct" his probable idea regarding wilāyah on the basis of scraps and patches of information available in certain old and new sources, by comparing and cross-checking the internal evidences found therein.²

¹ Despite the rich variety of Tirmidhī's thought, which can be verified by looking at the diverse subjects of his several works, Hujwīrī singled out his doctrine of wilāyah and typified him with it in a lengthy discourse on Ḥakīmīs, the Sufī school founded, according to him, by Tirmidhī. See the following note.

² The sources for this discussion are, besides Tirmidhī himself, some of whose quotations regarding wilāyah are found in certain old and now writers, Hujwīrī, Ḥattār and Ibn Ḥarabī (on the authority of Massignon, *Essai Sur les Origines du lexique de la mystique musulmane*, Paris, 1922, and Arberry and Ḥabd al-Qādir who have discussed this 'problem in their introduction to Tirmidhī's *Kitāb al-Riyāḍah wa Adab al-Nafs*. Cairo, 947, and have also given a brief summary of Tirmidhī's *Kitāb Khatm al- Awliyā'* Though some reference was made to this problem by Sulamī, as Dhahabī (*Tadhkirat ai-Ḥuf'āz* [Hyderabad, 1956], II, 645), and Subkī (*Ṭabaqāt al-Shāf'iyyah* [Cairo, n.d.], II, 20) inform, but Hujwīrī was the first to discuss it in full. Talking about the doctrines held by Ḥakīmīs, Hujwīrī gives a lengthy discourse on wilāyah and very scrupulously tries to give the whole credit of ideas contained in it to Tirmidhī's (*Kash al-Mahjūb*, tr. RA. Nicholson [Leiden, 1911], pp. 210-41). But it is open to very serious doubt whether all the ideas contained in it really belong to Tirmidhī. Some of them, however, can be verified by cross-checking with other sources. Almost the same is the case with Ibn Ḥarabī who, besides preserving and answering the famous 155 questions raised by Tirmidhī in his *Kitāb* *Khatm al-Awliyā'* (Massignon, op. cit., pp. 259-62), has probably benefited from Tirmidhī and has used his ideas as the basis for developing his own particular ideas about wilāyah (Arberry and Qadir, Eds., op. cit., p 20). It is very difficult to find out what in it is Ibn Ḥarabī's own and what belongs to Tirmidhī. The two works by Ḥuthmān Yaḥyā entitled *Loeuvre de Tirmidhī*, Damascus, 1957, and *Kitāb Khatm al-Awliyā' li Tirmidhī* (Beirut, 1960), which contain brief descriptions of, and quotations from, Tirmidhī's works, and Ḥuthmān Yaḥyā's analysis of the contents of *Kitāb Khātm al-Awliyā'* in *Annuaire 1960-61 de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes-Etudes, Section des Sciences Religieuses*

No attempt will be made to establish the originality or otherwise of Tirmidhī's doctrines about wilāyah by investigating the origin of the word and concept of wilayah, or by comparing Tirmidhī's ideas in this regard with those of the others, his predecessors or contemporaries.³ Examination of the influences of this particular doctrine through Tirmidhī on the later development of Sufism will also be out of the limited scope of this paper.⁴

Here in this paper we shall only try to find out what, in all probability, were the ideas held by Tirmidhī in respect to wilāyah. Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, which presents the first lengthy account of this doctrine of Tirmidhī, can very well serve as the base for this enquiry.

The aspects of Tirmidhī's doctrine of wilāyah which we propose to deal with in this paper are the nature of wilāyah, wilāyah'āmrnah and wilāyah khāṣṣah, ranks or hierarchy of awliyā', the interrelation-ship between wilāyah and nubuwwah; and the concept of khatm al-awliyā'.

Hujwīrī opens his discourse on the affirmation of saintship (wilāyah) with these words: You must know that the principle and foundation of Sufism and knowledge of God rests on saintship, the reality of which is unanimously affirmed by all the shaīkhs, though everyone has expressed himself in different language [later on he says that certain shaikhs formerly composed books on this subject, but they became rare and soon disappeared.]⁵ He also quotes some definitions of saintship given by shaikhs such as Abū Yazīd.⁶ The peculiarity of Muhammad b. 'Alī . . . lies in the fact that he applied this term to the theory of Sufism.⁷ These statements clearly show that Hujwīrī was conscious of the fact that Tirmidhī was not the first

(Paris, 1961), pp. 143-48, as well as a very brief survey of Tirmidhī's doctrine of wilāyah in Henry Corbin's *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris, 1964), I, 273-75, can be very helpful in ascertaining the veracity of some of the ideas attributed to Tirmidhī.

³ Corbin has pointed out that the word, concept and the thing itself of wilāyah are found in the texts concerning the teachings of Shiite Imams (op. cit., p. 273). Corbin has specified that the notion of double wilāyah found in Tirmidhī was first established by Shiite doctrine (ibid., p. 274). The concept of the double cycles of wilāyah and nubuwwah was also postulated by Shiite prophetic philosophy (ibid., p. 275).

⁴ See, however, Arberry and Qadir, Eds., op. cit., pp. 26 f.

⁵ Hujwīrī, op. cit., p. 212.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 216-18.

⁷ Ibid., p. 210

Sun to use this terminology, though apparently he does not know or does not want to mention even the earlier use of it, particularly in Shi'ite circles.⁸ Then Hujwārī presents the etymology of the term wadī, demonstrating that it has two maṣādir, first wilāyah meaning nuṣrat/ taṣarruf and rubūbiyyah, second wilāyah meaning imārah and maḥabbah, and that the term wale cannotes, at the same time, two senses, namely, murīd and murād of God, showing that it is a bilateral relationship between God and man.⁹ After that Hujwārī makes two distinct categories of awliyā': first, generality of believers who have the help and protection of God against the lower soul, carnal desires and the devil, etc.; and, second, God's exclusive friends whom He loves and who love Him, so that they turn away from the favour of man Kind tie is their walī and they are His awliyā'. these "exclusives" have in them two other categories of stilt "more exclusives": first, upon whom He confers a "friendship" that enables him to persevere in obedience to Him, and keeps him free from sin; and, sccond, upon whom He confers a friendship that empowers him to loose and bind, and makes his prayers answered and his aspirations efectual.¹⁰ Hujwārī, then, declares that "Now I will commend to you the explanation given by that venerable spiritual director who is the author of the doctrine."¹¹ (Perhaps in the sense that Tirmidhī was the first to present a full-fledged theory and system of Sufism based on the concept of wilāyah.) Earlier, Hujwārī had stated that Tirmidhī's doctrine "was based on saintship,... and, he used to explain the true nature of saintship and the degrees of the saints and the observance of the proper arrangement of their ranks."¹²

To say that whatever follows now belongs to Tirmidhī is perhaps as difficult as to say that whatever was said up to now belonged to Hujwārī himself. That in the preceding discourse Tirmidhī might be speaking through Hujwārī could perhaps be borne out by the fact that the first of the two categories of awiyā' made by Hujwārī corresponds to the concept of wilāyah 'āmmah presented by Tirmidhī, according to Yaḥyā, in his Kitāb Khatm al-

⁸ See above, Note 3.

⁹ Hujwārī, op. cit., p. 211

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 212.

¹² Ibid., p. 210.

Awliyā',¹³ and the second category, with its two sub-divisions, corresponds not only to the explanation of awliyā' and their two categories of maktūmān and ahl ḥail wa 'aqd made, according to Hujwīrī, by Tirmidhī,¹⁴ but also to the wilāyah khāṣṣah in Kitāb) Khatm al-Awliyā',¹⁵

According to the resume of the contents of Kitāb Khatm al-Awliya' by Yaḥyā, "wilāyah is at the same time presence and intimacy with God. It could be represented under the form of a sphere where the totality of believers are arranged in hierarchical order. For there exists a wilāyah of general order (wilāyah 'āmmah) and a wilāyah of particular order (wilāyah khāṣṣah). On the general plane wilāyah embraces the great family of believers, in which the relation with God is effectuated by the enunciation of shahādah. It is the common bond of all faithful who believe in the message of God and His presence amongst them. But on the particular plane wilāyah is reserved to the elite of God, to His intimates who communicate with Him by means of an effective and transcendent union. These beings are those of the maintenance, of the communication and of the sakīnah. They have access to the Divine councils and speak to God face to face. These two planes or conditions of wilāyah express, in some way, the distinction which exists between the virtual and the real. When the simple believer possesses in him the germs of future realisation by means of faith, the wall, properly said, realises effectively, by the sanctifying grace, Divine intimacy and proximity, in a word, the life in God. Thus the problem of deliverance and of vision of God is resolved in anticipation for wall, properly said, in this world; while it remains to be resolved for a simple believer in the life Hereafter."¹⁶

That the coming statement in Hujwīrī regarding the nature of wilāyah is an exposition of the ideas of Tirmidhī, as Hujwīrī claims it to be, can perhaps be accepted on the grounds that, one, the concept of wilāyah presented here is similar to the concept of "proper" or "real" walī presented in Kitāb Khatm al-Awliyā', and, two, that at the very outset Hujwīrī mentions ḥadīth ghibtah

¹³ See below, next para.

¹⁴ Hujwīrī, op. cit., pp. 212 f.

¹⁵ See below, next para.

¹⁶ Yaḥyā, op. cit., pp. 146 f. Also compare wilāyah 'āmmah and wilāyah khāṣṣah with the two modes of spiritual realisation, ṣidq and minna, respectively, presented in the same article (ibid., pp. 143-461).

which has almost been bracketed with the name of Tirmidhī¹⁷ Hujwīrī's statement is as follows: Cod has saints (awliyā') whom He has specially distinguished by His friendship and whom He has chosen to be the governors of His Kingdom and has marked out to manifest His actions and has peculiarly favoured with diverse kinds of miracles (karāmāt) and has purged of natural corruptions and has delivered from subjection to their lower soul and passion, so that all their thoughts are of Him and their intimacy is with Him alone. Such have been in past ages, and are now, and shall be hereafter until the Day of Resurrection n ... inasmuch as the traditional and intellectual proofs of this religion are to be found among the divines ('ulamā'), it follows that the visible proof is to be found among the saints and elect of God... through the blessing of their advent the rain falls from heaven, and through the purity of their lives the plants spring up from the earth, and through their spiritual influence the Muslims gain victories over the unbelievers."¹⁸

Tirmidhī, like all other Sufis, has a tendency towards classifying the seekers after God into degrees and ranks. In this connection Hujwīrī informs us that there are two categories of chosen awliyā': Those who are concealed are four thousand in number; they do not know each other, are unaware of the excellence of their state and are hidden from themselves and from mankind. Of those who have power to loose and bind and are officers of Divine court there are three hundred akhyār, forty abdāl, seven abrār, four awtād, three nuqabā', and one quṭb or ghawth. All these know one another and cannot act except by mutual consent.¹⁹ At another place he mentions that every night awtād go round the world and if at any spot their eyes are not fallen some imperfection will appear there next day and they must, then, inform the quṭb so that he may put it right.²⁰ Here he dreams that Tirmidhī is one of the forty, that he is a watad, and the story of his meeting with the quṭb in the desert of Bani Isrā'īl may be mentioned.²¹ Also, according to

¹⁷ Dhahabī, op. cit., p. 645 ; Subkī, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁸ Hujwīrī, op. cit., p. 213

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 213 f.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 228.

²¹ Tirmidhī, Buduw Shan Abī 'Abd Allah, Ed. `Uthmān Yaḥyā (Beirut, 1960), pp. 396-410; Hujwīrī, op. cit., p. 229; 'Attar, Tadhkirat al-Awliyā' (London, 1905), II, 92.

Massignon, Tirmidhī defined the degrees of sainthood in a letter to 'Uthmān of Rayy.²²

Hujwīrī talks about the relationship between walī and nabī and between wilāyah and nubuwwah separately in a "discourse on the superiority of the prophets to the saints"²³ and also in connection with the discussion on miracles.²⁴ As a matter of fact, the major portion of his discourse on Ḥakīmīs deals with the affirmation of karāmāt and the differentiation between karāmāt and 'mu' jizāt. It is almost impossible to say, with any measure of surety, how much of this lengthy discourse on karāmāt, which is a bit confusing and at some places perhaps self-contradictory, represents the ideas of Tirmidhī, except perhaps at two points where Hujwīrī explicitly ascribes them to Tirmidhī. First, that the denial of saintship and consequently the disappearance of karāmāt depend on something inconsistent with faith, namely, apostasy (riddah) ; it does not depend on sin. The underlying idea is perhaps that, to quote Hujwīrī, "miracles (karāmāt) and saintship are Divine gifts, not things acquired by man, so that human actions (kasb) cannot become the cause of Divine guidance."²⁵ According to Yaḥyā this idea can also be found in Tirmidhī's al- Fare! Bayn al-Āyāt waal-Karāmāt where he has said that mu'jizah or āyah is a positive proof of the authenticity of the Messenger, while the karāmah is a simple providential gift.²⁶ Second, that miracles are manifested in the state of sobriety and composure (Ṣaḥw wa tamkīn) and not in the state of intoxication and rapture (sukr wa ghalbah).²⁷ This certainly is in line with Tirmidhī's concept of awliyā' as governors (ḥukkām) and mature beings (rasīdgān).²⁸

As to the relationship between walī and nabī and wilāyah and nubuwwah, Hujwīrī says that, by universal consent of the Sufi shaikhs, the awliyā' are at all times and in all circumstances sub-ordinate to the anbiyā'. Anbiyā' are superior to awliyā' because the end of wilāyah is only the beginning of nubuwwah. Every nabī is a walī, but some awliyā are not anbiyā'. The

²² Massignon, op. cit., p. 264.

²³ Hujwīrī, op. cit., p. 235-39,

²⁴ Ibid., pp, 218-35

²⁵ Ibid., p. 225.

²⁶ Yaḥyā, Loeuvre, p. 428.

²⁷ Hujwīrī, op. cit., pp. 226-28.

²⁸ See above.

anbiyā' are constantly exempt from the attributes of humanity (si f āt-i basharīyyah) while the awliyā' are so only temporarily.²⁹ At another place Hujwīrī says that the pre-eminence of Prophets depends on their exalted rank and on their being preserved from the defilement of sin.³⁰ He further elaborates the idea by saying that awliyā' are not preserved from sin (ma'ṣūm), for sinlessness belongs to the Prophets, but they are protected (maḥfūz) from any evil that involves the denial of their wilāyah.³¹ This is Hujwīrī's explanation of Ṭirmidhī's doctrine concerning the relative ranks of walī and nabī and wilāyah and nubuwwah. He not only subordinates the awliyā' to anbiyā' but very explicitly and forcefully places the rank of nubuwwah above the rank of wilāyah. This is in open contrast to the account of Ṭirmidhī's ideas contained in Kitāb Khatm al-Awliyā' which, though it places anbiyā' above awliyā', very definitely subordinates nubuwwah to wilāyah or, to be more precise, regards wilāyah of a nabī superior to his nubuwwah. That is not all; it also says that God can give a walī a favour which He refuses to Prophets and Apostles. And perhaps a tendency towards equalising walī and nabī in respect to protection from sin can also be detected in this account which proceeds as follows: The sphere of wilāyah en-globes not only the community of believers but also the Prophets and the Apostles, because they have in themselves, besides their particular function, also the wilāyah. The personality of the Apostles like that of the Prophets has many functions. It is presented at the same time under the exterior form, which is then prophecy and under the interior form which then is wilāyah. However, every Prophet or Apostle is a walī, but not the other way round. It can happen that God gives a walī favours which He refuses to Prophets and Apostles, e.g. the case of Solomon and his companion who had the science (Qur'an, xxvii. 40) and of Moses and Khidr (Qur'an, xviii. 65-82). In itself the wilāyah is superior to prophecy and apostleship. For one reason, because it is common to Apostles, Prophets and awliyā', for another reason because of its intemporal nature. It is an intimate and transcendent union with God. Prophecy has an eschatological nature. It is determined by the existential cycle. The apostleship has social nature. And thus prophecy and apostleship are situated on the temporal plane, while the wilāyah is situated on a Divine

²⁹ Hujwīrī, op. cit., pp. 237 f.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 219.

³¹ Ibid., p. 225.

plane where it is an attribute and perfection. Among the Divine Names, and Attributes one finds walī and not nabī and rasūl. But the primacy of wilāyah over prophecy and apostleship does not mean that the walī should be superior to the Prophet and Apostle, because they are equally of the awliyā'. The Prophet and Apostle are protected from error by virtue of revelation, and the walī by virtue of ḥaqq and sakīnah.³² However, the function of the Prophet being salvation demands the adherence of creatures, and those who refuse the message are considered infidels. For the walī, although the whole universe chants of his sainthood, adherence is not required, only solicited. His refuser incurs no formal punishment, but is deprived of Divine light.³³

But Hujwīrī's account has some supporting evidence also. It is supported not only by a later source, namely, 'Aṭṭār,³⁴ but also by as early a source as Tirmidhī himself. He has presented two quotations from two different works of Tirmidhī in which the rank of nubuwwah is placed above that of wilāyah. The first, taken from Nawādīr al-Uṣūl, says: "The jannāt 'adn are the abode of the anbiyā', upon whom be peace; and the firdaws is the abode of awliyā', which consists of ghuraf, which are the inner sanctum of al-jannah, in front of the door which leads to God's Throne. Men have fancied that these are abodes of the anbiyā', upon whom be peace, that none other than the anbiyā' reach these abodes. You should know that it does not comprise the abodes of the anbiyā', upon whom be peace, but the abodes of the awliyā'. The anbiyā' are above the awliyā' because the rank of nubuwwah is higher." The second, taken from Ma'rifat al-Asrār, says: "Know that prophecy constitutes forty-six portions, and these portions belong only to the Prophet. He who in reality possesses two or three of these portions is one of the saints (awliyā') through whom this world subsists."³⁵ If the above-mentioned works of Tirmidhī are authentic, and their authenticity has not yet been challenged, then, in the light of these two extracts, provided they are correctly understood, it would not be very easy to explain. Hujwīrī's account as an attempt, on the part of a very cautious orthodox Sunnī Muslim, to tone down the radical views of Tirmidhī and to bring it into line with orthodoxy. But, then, the authenticity of Kitāb Khatm al-awliyā has not been challenged

³² Cf. Sulamī, Ṭabaaāt al-Ṣūfiyah (Cairo, 1953), p. 220.

³³ Yaḥyā, Annuaire, pp. 147 f.

³⁴ 'Aṭṭār, op. cit., pp. 97 f.

³⁵ Heer, "Bio-Biblio," p. 124.

either. It leaves us perhaps with only one possibility—the possibility of the development and change in the thinking of Tirmidhī. The question arises: which of these conflicting works was written earlier? Due to lack of information regarding Tirmidhī, this question cannot be answered yet. Or is there any possibility that under public pressure, which had resulted in his exile from Tirmidhī, Tirmidhī might have changed his views regarding wilāyah and had his books like Kitāb Khatm al-Awliyā thrown into the river?³⁶ Or was it that Tirmidhī was simply confused and inconsistent in his thought as seems to be more clear a case in his doctrine of khatrn all-Awliyā?

Orthodox Hujwīrī is conspicuously free from any vestige of the idea of khātm al-awliyā', although he has the idea of the continuity of the institution of wilāyah as the prophetic evidence (burhān-i nabawī) until the Day of Resurrection.³⁷ But comparatively unorthodox 'Apr has the idea of khātim al-awliyā' and quotes Tirmidhī in the following words³⁸:

According to Kitāb Khātm al-Awliyā', "just as the prophecy, symbolically represented under a form of sphere where the Prophets are arranged in order, is completed by the Seal of the Prophets, in the same way the wilāyah which man festes itself on the scene of history by the luminous figures of the awliyā' is completed by the seal of the awliyā'. The wilāyah like prophecy finds its complete blossoming in the seal. But while prophecy has ended with the Prophet Muhammad, wilāyah will go on until the end of the world."³⁹ Tirmidhi leaves no definite clue as to who is this khātim al-awliyā'. Arberry and 'Abd al-Qādir, on the basis of some extremely vague hints in the famous questionnaire of Tirmidhī, have drawn the conclusion that it can be supposed that the Prophet himself is meant by Tirmidhi to be the khātim al-awliyā'.⁴⁰ But this supposition cannot hold good on three grounds. Firstly, the same questionnaire shows that Tirmidhī himself wants to find out who deserves the rank of khātim al-awliyā' as the Prophet deserves the rank of khātim al-anbiyā'. Not only that, it also shows that Tirmidhī wasn't even sure

³⁶ Tirmidhī, Budaw, pp. 393-96 ; Uhababī, op. cit., p. 41 ; Hujwīrī, op. cit., p. 142.37. Attar, op. cit., p. 97.

³⁷ Hujwīrī's, op, cit., p. 213,

³⁸ Attar, op, cit., p.97.

³⁹ Yahyā, Armoire, pp. 147 f.

⁴⁰ Arberry and Qadir, Ed., op. cit., p. 25.

of the meaning of the term khātim.⁴¹ Secondly, had Tirmidhī thought that the Prophet is the khātim al-awliyā', as he is the khātim al-anbiyā', there is no reason why he should not have declared it. If he had so declared, there was a chance that he might have saved himself from persecution.⁴² Thirdly, as Arberry and 'Abd al-Qādir have themselves pointed out, this supposition raises a number of questions which are difficult to answer. The term khātim has a dual sense of Kāmil and ākhir. If the Prophet is taken to be khātim al-awliyā' in the former sense, then, keeping in view Tirmidhī's concept of the continuity of wilāyah until the end of the world, it cannot be true in the case of khātim alanbiyā' because it will mean that the door of prophecy is also open which, according to Tirmidhī himself, is closed (وقد ختم الله تعالى بالرسول (الرساله و لم يبق في الارض بعده الا الملهمون و المحدثون). If the Prophet is taken to be khātim al-awliyā' in the latter sense, then he cannot be so because wilāyah is continuing after him. So it seems that if the Prophet is regarded as khātim al-awliyā, lot of confusion arises. But what if Tirmidhī meant that somebody else besides the Prophet is the khātim al-awliyā'? Then it will mean that this khātim should be superior to khātim al-anbiyā', because wilāyah in itself is superior to nubuwwah.⁴³

ISLAM AND THE CONCEPT OF PUNISHMENT*

Islam imposes preventive punishments which may appear cruel or coarse if viewed superficially or without proper consideration. But Islam does not execute such punishments unless it ascertains that the crime was not justifiable or that the criminal was not acting under any obligation... Islam took similar precautions with respect to all the punishments it had prescribed...

Omar was known for his strict rigidity in enforcing the rules of the Shari'ah; therefore it cannot be said that he was lenient in the interpretation of the law. He did not carry out the punishment prescribed for theft (cutting the hand) during the year of famine...

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 16,

⁴² See above, Note 36,

⁴³ Arberry and Qadir, Eds., op. cit., pp. 25 f.

It was reported to Omar that some boys in the service of Hatib Ibn Abi Balta'a had stolen the she-camel of a man from the tribe of Muznah. When Omar questioned the boys they admitted the theft, so he ordered their hands to be cut. But, on second thought, he said: "By God, I would cut their hands if I did not know that you employ these boys and starve them so that they would be permitted to eat that which is prohibited unto them." Then he addressed their employer saying: "By God, since I have not cut their hands I am going to penalize you with a fine that shall pain you," and he ordered him to pay double the price of the she-camel.

*From Muhammad Qutb, *Islam, the Misunderstood Religion* (Kuwait, Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, 1974), pp. 248-49.