

## HAKIM TIRMIDHI'S VIEWS ON TAFSIR AND TA'WIL

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There are some similarities and some contradictions between the concepts of tafsir and ta'wil. "Tafsir" means interpreting the verses of the Qur'an based on the narrations, that is, "ma'thur". As for the brief description of the tafsir, the tafsir is the explanation of the meaning of the verse. The term, on the other hand, refers to a complex science that combines a number of relevant sciences necessary for the correct interpretation of Qur'anic verses. Tafsir is divided into aqli (bil-ra'y) and naqli (bil-ma'thur) types. In this brief definition, one can understand the terminological meaning of the word tafsir as it is understood today. Tafsir can also be described as one's understanding the purpose of the Qur'an at the level of his own mind and explaining it to others<sup>143</sup>.

As for the term ta'wil, it is the return of something to the original. Ta'wil of a sentence is to think about it and reveal its meaning. As a term ta'wil means reaching the essence of the sentence<sup>144</sup>.

According to Imam Maturidi, tafsir means the commentary of the Companions, and ta'wil means the commentary of the faqihs. This means that the Companions were direct witnesses of the situation and knew the cause of the revelation of the Qur'an. Their interpretation of the verse, which they saw with their own eyes and witnessed firsthand, is exactly true<sup>145</sup>. Also, tafsir is a firm conclusion that the purpose of a particular word is exactly that, and it must be convincing enough to bear witness in the name of Allah that this is exactly what it means. If such a conclusive proof is found, it will be true, otherwise it is an intellectual interpretation and this is prohibited. Ta'wil is to choose one of the

<sup>143</sup> Obidov R. Qur'on mavzularining ma'naviy-tarixiy ahamiyati. – Toshkent: TIU, 2009. – B. 64.

<sup>144</sup> Qattan, M. (1990). Al-Mabahis fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbiyya, pp. 316–317.

<sup>145</sup> Al-Maturidi, Abu Mansur Muhammad. (2005). Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunna. Istanbul: Dar al-Mizan, 3/84.

possible meanings, which does not require determination and testimony from Allah<sup>146</sup>.

Hence, one of several probabilities is selected in the interpretation. Of course, the probabilities at this point do not arise because one is too unreliable or one is weaker or stronger than the other. Conversely, the most appropriate argument is selected from among them when the level of a number of arguments proving different meanings is equal. The reason for the lack of determination is that the rest of the evidence is not weak either.

Imam Maturidi said that the difference between ta'wil and tafsir is that the tafsir is the commentary of the Companions, and the ta'wil belongs to the faqihs. If the tafsirs from the Companions are equal in terms of evidence, choosing the rajih qawl from them requires the ijihad of the faqih. The product of ijihad is the result of mental activity, which belongs to ta'wil.

If the ta'wil only reveals, interprets, and explains the meaning of the sentence, then it becomes synonym of the word tafsir. However, when the interpretation reveals the essence of the sentence, that is, when the context of the sentence means what it means, the difference between the tafsir and ta'wil becomes even clearer. According to the definition given by Imam Suyuti, tafsir is an explanation that has a clear meaning in the Book of Allah and Sunnah in terms of its clarity and ta'wil arises through istinbat of the scholars. For this reason, some say that tafsir refers to narration and ta'wil refers to dirayah (thinking)<sup>147</sup>.

It can be said that the above description can fully reveal the meaning of tafsir and ta'wil that is understood today. This is because it is now understood that a commentary on a verse is a tafsir only if it is based on a narration. Ta'wil, on the other hand, is seen more as a product of mental activity. In this respect, some fundamentalist movements, especially the Salafis, try to deny any form of ta'wil. The problem here stems from the Salafis' attempts to superficially understand and explain certain words in the Qur'an. The reason is that ta'wil reveals the true meaning of the words in the Qur'an, and especially the expressions that come as metaphors and does not allow them to be understood superficially. At the same time, the commentator and linguist Abu Hilal al-Askari (920-1005) has a view that ta'wil is a "commentary of the mutashabih"<sup>148</sup>. This leads to the conclusion that the interpretation of mutashabih verses that explain the doctrinal rulings is ta'wil, and the interpretation of non-mutashabih verses is a tafsir, even if it contains elements

<sup>146</sup> This conclusion was cited by al-Suyuti in a paraphrased manner rather than as a direct adoption of al-Maturidi's view. In the Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunna, this idea is expressed using different wording. See: al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din. Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 2008, p. 759.

<sup>147</sup> As-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din. (2008). Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, p. 759.

<sup>148</sup> Kaya, S. (2015). The Concept of Ta'wil in the Context of Wujuh and Nazair Books in the Qur'an. Journal of Human and Social Sciences Research, 4(4), 922-945. – p. 938.

of ijtihad. Accordingly, tafsir is a more general term and includes ta'wil, but ta'wil cannot be tafsir.

There are a number of verses in the Qur'an about knowing the meaning of ta'wil. One of them says:

وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ

"But no one knows its interpretation except Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge."<sup>149</sup> This verse should be understood in the same way, that is, even those who are grounded in knowledge know the interpretation. This can be seen from the words of the Companion Ibn Abbas after this verse:

أنا من الراسخين في العلم الذين يعلمون تأويله

"I am one of those who know its interpretation"<sup>150</sup>. Rasikh means a person who knows something deeply and has a deep understanding. Mujahid, Rabi ibn Anas, and Muhammad ibn Ja'far, the first generation of Muslims, also mentioned themselves as one of the rasikhs who knew ta'wil.

At the same time, Ibn Abbas's statement on the meaning of Surah an-Nasr is an example of the fact that ta'wil can be based entirely on dirayah - that is, understanding. When Umar ibn Khattab invited him to explain the meaning of Surah an-Nasr to the great Companions, he said that it meant that the Prophet would die soon. However, there was no evidence or narration to prove it neither in the lexical content of the surah nor in the Companions who heard this interpretation. It is stated that they first heard this meaning from Ibn Abbas<sup>151</sup>.

In some places, Hakim Tirmidhi also used the term "tafsir" to refer to his views. If we look carefully at such sentences, we will see that they are followed by a verse that supports the sentence. However, there is no example of a verse in places called "ta'wil of a particular word". This is in line with Imam Maturidi's view that the tafsir is based on solid evidence, and that the ta'wil is chosen from the probabilities. This coincidence shows that Hakim Tirmidhi clearly distinguished between ta'wil and tafsir in his book Tahsil Nazair al-Qur'an.

In order to better understand what Hakim Tirmidhi meant by ta'wil, it is necessary to consider his interpretations of this term. Hakim Tirmidhi also emphasizes the role and importance of ta'wil in Tahsil Nazair al-Qur'an. In the forty-third chapter (43) of the work, wajhs of the word "at-ta'wil" are listed. Hakim Tirmidhi first explains in detail the lexical meaning of the ta'wil. He then reveals its inner meanings as well. According to him, ta'wil is to demand the beginning of something. Whoever understands the beginning of deeds and the beginning of things then he understands its interpretation. The beginning of things is in the

<sup>149</sup> Surah Al Imran:7 // The Noble Qur'an.

<sup>150</sup> Al-Qurtubi. *Tafsir of Surah Al Imran*.

<sup>151</sup> Bukhari. Book of Qur'an Commentary (Kitab Tafsir al-Qur'an).

science of Ibtida, which Allah revealed on the Day when He determined destinies and created creatures in darkness. Whoever understands the beginning of things, they also understand the interpretations. That is, they perceive the true nature of things through the grace of God's light<sup>152</sup>.

It is clear from the above definition that Hakim Tirmidhi explains the concept of ta'wil in an absolutely positive sense from the very beginning. Those who understand the interpretations are seen as possessors of the light of Allah, the possessors of laduni knowledge. Ta'wil is not simply the product of mental research, but the realization of His will in a particular place as a result of Allah's mercy on the servant.

So, according to Hakim Tirmidhi, ta'wil is considered as an absolutely positive concept. However, understanding the ta'wil is a matter within the competence of individuals who are worthy of this knowledge, and not everyone can meet such a requirement.

Hakim Tirmidhi explains that the first wajh of the ta'wil in the Qur'an is the same as tafsir. This is because ta'wil reveals the obstacles in the Qur'an where the meaning is hidden, and then the meaning of the word becomes clear.

The second meaning of the ta'wil in the Qur'an is the interpretation of a dream<sup>153</sup>, and Hakim Tirmidhi explains this by the need for an interpreter of the dream who can translate it into the language of truth. In other words, the interpreter reaches the essence of the work which Allah gave a dharb al-mathal of it in a dream. This is the beginning of the matter, where the dharb al-mathal is secondary. The interpreter clarifies its meaning, which is "first." The "first" is what is destined in the Lawh al-Mahfuz<sup>154</sup>.

In his above commentary, Hakim Tirmidhi points out that according to his method, the root of the word ta'wil is derived from the word "first". The main point to note here is that the reason why the interpretation is expressed by the word ta'wil is that what is to be interpreted is expressed through metaphor and allegory. That is, what is superficial and obvious does not need to be interpreted. Dreams, on the other hand, consist of metaphors and tashbih and dharb al-mathal. It is called ta'wil to return it to its "first" meaning, that is, to its purpose, and to reveal its essence. If this view is taken as a rule, it follows that mutashabih verses in the Qur'an must be interpreted. This is because that the appearance of the mutashabih does not express the essence dharb al-mathal, there is a need to reveal its essence.

<sup>152</sup> al-Tirmidhī, al-Hākim. Taḥṣīl Nazā'ir al-Qur'ān. Prepared for publication by Ḥusnī Zaydān. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, 1969. – p. 115.

<sup>153</sup> See: Yūsuf: 44; 100 // The Noble Qur'an.

<sup>154</sup> al-Tirmidhī, al-Hākim. Taḥṣīl Nazā'ir al-Qur'ān. Prepared for publication by Ḥusnī Zaydān. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, 1969. – p. 116.



When Imam Maturidi spoke about the impossibility of seeing Allah in a dream, he said that what is seen in a dream consists of fantasies and examples, and that Allah is freed from such things<sup>155</sup>.

The third of the wajhs that Hakim Tirmidhi quoted in the word ta'wil is the meaning of "consequence". This is because that the result and the outcome depend on the beginning of the work. Verse 35 of Surah al-Isra states: "Give in full when you measure, and weigh with an even balance. That is fairest and best in the end". At this point, it is pointed out that the result of the work that was right in the beginning will also be right.

The fourth "wajh" quoted by Hakim Tirmidhi in his commentary is "the place of return". For something to come back, it has to be where it started. This is stated in verse 59 of Surah an-Nisa, and if a dispute arises between Muslims for any reason, it is commanded to return it to Allah and the Prophet, and it is described as "This is the best and fairest resolution."

The fifth and final "wajh" of the word ta'wil is the truth, that is, the essence, and the beginning of things is from al-Haqq. Their truth is the end. The beginning is closely related to the end. That is, since the beginning of things is from the will of Allah the Almighty, the end is also subject to His will. In order to understand the truth of this, it is necessary to know al-Haqq.

The term ta'wil is found only in the work of al-Wujuh and an-Nazair fil-Qur'an al-Karim by Harun ibn Musa, one of the predecessors of Hakim Tirmidhi who wrote a work on wujuh and nazair. In fact, the author who most agrees with Hakim Tirmidhi on this issue is Harun ibn Musa, and this similarity suggests that the Tahsil Nazair al-Qur'an might be written as a refutation to him. However, even if we compare only the term "ta'wil" found in the works of Hakim Tirmidhi and Harun ibn Musa, it is clear that their "wajh" are not completely consistent:

Nazair №43: Wahjs of al-Ta'wil		
No	Hakim Tirmidhi	Harun ibn Musa
1.	Al-tafsir	'Aaqibah
2.	Ta'bir ar-ru'ya	Muntaha
3.	Al-'Aaqibah	Ta'bir ar-ru'ya
4.	Al-Marja'	Tahqiq
5.	Al-Haqqiqah	Alwaan

It can be seen from the table that there is a big difference in the sequence and naming of the wajhs, even if the nazairs are compatible. Harun ibn Musa agreed with Hakim Tirmidhi in only two of the five wajhs (2/5). In the other three wajhs,

<sup>155</sup> al-Qārī, Mullā 'Alī. Sharḥ al-Fiqh al-Akbar. Tashkent: Uzbekistan International Islamic Academy Publishing, 2021. – p. 268.

they contradict each other. In Muqatil ibn Sulayman<sup>156</sup> and Yahya ibn Salam, this "nazair" is not found at all. In this regard, the author, denied by Hakim Tirmidhi, remains anonymous.

According to the Turkish scholar Sulayman Kaya, Muqatil ibn Sulayman's work was studied by the Egyptian scholar Abdullah Mahmud Shihata and published under the title *al-Ashbah wa al-Nazair*. It was also prepared for publication by another Turkish scholar, Ali Ozak, under the title *Kitab al-Wujuh wa al-Nazair*. In two editions, the word "al-ta'wil" is mentioned as the 26th nazair<sup>157</sup>.

In another study, Sulayman Kaya also cites the word "wajh" in these editions of Muqatil ibn Sulayman's work, which refers to the word "at-ta'wil."<sup>158</sup> The "wajhs" cited by Sulayman Kaya are the same as those of Harun ibn Musa, except for the order of placement. Comparing them with Hakim Tirmidhi, they look like this:

Nazair №43: Wahjs of al-Ta'wil		
No	Hakim Tirmidhi	Harun ibn Musa
1.	Al-tafsir	Muntaha
2.	Ta'bir ar-ru'ya	'Aaqibah
3.	Al-'Aaqibah	Ta'bir ar-ru'ya
4.	Al-Marja'	Tahqiq
5.	Al-Haqiqah	Alwaan

The "nazair" and "wajh" in the work attributed to Muqatil ibn Sulayman also do not correspond to the "wajh" quoted by Hakim Tirmidhi. However, Hatim Salih Zamin, an Iraqi scholar who studied Muqatil ibn Sulayman's work, prepared it for publication, and published it in 2005 under the title *al-Wujuh wan-Nazair fil-Qur'an al-Azim* mentions that the work was published incorrectly under the title *al-Ashbah wal Nazair*. He criticizes a number of errors in the publication in a short but sharp tone, and also briefly mentions the corrected places in his publication. Although it is clear that the publisher is Abdullah Mahmud Shihata, Hatim Zamin did not mention his name, but expressed distrust in his firm publication<sup>159</sup>. In this regard, it is not possible to rely on this publication, and it is concluded that there is no "ta'wil" in the work of Muqatil ibn Sulayman.

Another important issue is the connection between the ta'wil and the terms "wajh" and "wujuh" in Hakim Tirmidhi's work. "Tahsil Nazair al-Qur'an" is a work aimed at revealing the inner meanings of words of the Qur'an. Hakim Tirmidhi

<sup>156</sup> See: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. *al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*. Edited by H.S. Zomin. Baghdad–Dubai: Juma al-Majid Center, 2005.; Yahyā ibn Sallām.

<sup>157</sup> Kaya S. *Hakīm Tirmīzī'de vüçûh ve nezâir*. – Istanbul: Ragbet, 2016. –S. 72.

<sup>158</sup> Kaya S. *Vüçûh ve Nezâir Kitapları Bağlamında Kur'anda Te'vîl Kavramı*. İnsan ve toplum bilimleri araştırmaları dergisi. Cilt: 4, Sayı: 4, 2015. ss: 922-945. –S. 932.

<sup>159</sup> Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. *al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*. Edited by H.S. Zomin. Baghdad–Dubai: Juma al-Majid Center, 2005. – pp. 8–10.

understands and explains the essence when he says "wajh". This is exactly in line with his comments on the word of ta'wil. According to Hakim Tirmidhi, "wajh" is the interpretation of the word. According to Hakim Tirmidhi, ta'wil is to reveal the truth of the metaphor, the essence of the allegory, and the purpose of the work.

In order to better understand the essence of the matter, if we refer to the work of Imam Maturidi, who created the largest fundamental work on the interpretation of the Qur'an, *Tawilat Ahl al-Sunnah*, we see that the words "wajh" and "wujuh" are used very often. Imam Maturidi, when explaining the difference between tafsir and ta'wil, also pointed to the issue of wajh as a decisive factor. He says:

"Tafsir has one wajh and ta'wil has many wajhs."<sup>160</sup>

It is clear from this that tafsir is a commentary that has a definite meaning. It is unlikely to mean more than one meaning. Ta'wil, on the other hand, can have several meanings. Exactly which meaning is appropriate (rajih) for a particular place is selected by ijtihad. In this regard, Imam Maturidi also stated that ta'wil means the statement and the end of the matter<sup>161</sup>.

Summarizing the above examples, it can be said that "wajh" and "wujuh" in the Qur'anic sciences are concepts directly related to the process of interpretation. The "wajhs" in the words of the Qur'an include all the probabilities that can be interpreted. The narrator reveals the true meaning and purpose of the verse as a result of choosing one of the existing "wajhs" of the word, rather than relying on his opinion. It can be assessed as the correct interpretation when choosing the right and worthy meaning from the existing "wajhs". The importance of knowing the "nazair" and "wajh" in the Qur'an is the most important factor in the correct interpretation.

Hakim Tirmidhi's work *Tahsil Nazair al-Qur'an* can be considered as a work that reveals the methodology of interpretation. This is because Hakim Tirmidhi, unlike his predecessors, does not present the various meanings of words in the Qur'an as examples of facts in terms of lexical formation, but urges them to get to the essence of each word, to pay attention to its essence, and to extract the meanings from the inner features of the word. His method of interpretation is simple and rejects form similarity and teaches a natural acceptance that words can have many meanings. According to his theory, hidayah is not synonymous with bayan, but the word hidayah itself has a feature of bayan at its core. Since the bayan is the result of hidayah, the hidayah can also be understood as a bayan in some places. The same rule applies to the rest of the words. No word can have a different meaning on its own and with no reason.

<sup>160</sup> al-Māturīdī, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad. *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*. Istanbul: Dār al-Mīzān, 2005. – Vol. 4, p. 85.

<sup>161</sup> al-Māturīdī, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad. *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*. Istanbul: Dār al-Mīzān, 2005. – Vol. 3, p. 84.

Accepting the ambiguity in words as a natural feature of the word teaches the natural acceptance of the interpretation of mutashabih verses. This forms the strongest intellectual refutation against sects and groups that seek to promote a literal and superficial interpretation of the mutashabih attributions of Allah and have a radical approach that denies interpretation.

Hakim Tirmidhi firmly acknowledges the place of reason in the interpretation:

“Some people went astray with their ignorant interpretations because of their lack of Arabic language and not understanding the meanings. Their hearts are corrupt, and they change their words because of the evil of their desires and hearts. The interpretation will be bad at a time when one’s understanding is little or gone.”<sup>162</sup>

Although ta’wil is, in terms of source, a product of dirayah, i.e. reason, it is not an unfounded interpretation of the text, but a natural feature that cannot be challenged by the Shari’ah. This feature was regarded by Islamic scholars as one of the signs of the miracle of the Qur'an. This may be evidence that refutes the claims of the sects that deny the interpretation. Tahsil Nazair al-Qur'an reveals exactly these aspects of Hakim Tirmidhi's theory of interpretation.

<sup>162</sup> al-Tirmidhī, al-Ḥākīm. Kitāb al-Akyās wa al-Mugharrīn. Prepared by A. Şayyih and S. Jamīlī. Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1990. – pp. 34–35.