

Understanding Hadith: Exoteric and Esoteric Dimensions by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiẓī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Mursī

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Abstract: The exoteric dimension is a systematic basis in looking for surface meaning of hadith. Whereas the esoteric dimension used to look for the unspeakable, the essential and the signal meaning. Understanding hadith meaning with both dimensions will explain the surface and deep meaning of hadith. By using qualitative approach, literary research and content analysis, this paper will discuss how the development of exoteric and esoteric dimensions in understanding hadith and both relationship. Each Islamic scholars has his own method when looking for the esoteric dimension in understanding hadith. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiẓī used proverbs (*amsāl*), al-Ghazālī used consideration (*i’tibār*), and Ibn al-‘Arabī used trainings (*riyādāt*) and struggles (*mujāhadāt*). Although using different terms, they agreed that the esoteric dimension must be based on the exoteric dimension. The detachment of the esoteric dimension from the exoteric dimension will cause the loss of the meaning foundation and will fall into *bāṭiniyyah* method.

Keywords: exoteric, esoteric, understanding of hadith, hadith

A. Introduction

The study of hadith has developed quite rapidly, especially in *isnād*, *matn*, *kitāb* and methodology. Various hadith studies that are integrated and interconnected with other sciences have been carried out by hadith researchers. Researches on *isnād*, *matn* and *kutub al-ḥadīṣ* using philological, archaeological, geographical, linguistic approaches and non-Muslim external sources as carried out by positivist or traditionalist schools in the study of hadith.¹ Both schools have different opinion on internal (*matn*) or external

¹ Harald Motzki, “Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey,” *Arabica* 52, no. 2 (2005): 204–53; Andreas Görke, Harald Motzki, and Gregor Schoeler, “First Century Sources for the Life of Muhammad? A Debate,” *Der Islam; Berlin* 89, no. 1/2 (2012): 2–59; Jonathan E. Brockopp, *Muhammad’s Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities, 622-950*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Gregor Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad: Nature and Authenticity*, ed. James E. Montgomery, trans. Uwe

(*isnād*) hadith, The positivists argued that hadith is not authentic and forged by companions of Prophet Muḥammad. They also said that hadith has no empirical and historical evidences such as the history of Bronze Age in Syria.² On other side, the traditionalists said that hadith is authentic and has both empirical and historical evidences. They accused that positivists tried to manipulate some of evidence and sometime they make erroneous interpretation and grammatical aspects.³

On internal aspect (*matn*), there are study of the hadith prohibiting women from traveling alone, the hadith about painting and the hadith of women's leadership using historical, sociological and anthropological approaches by Abdul Mustaqim. He said that understanding hadith with these approaches would bring hadith to an appreciative, dynamic, accommodating, precise and dynamic meaning to the recent times. Without using these approaches, one will fall into the trap of forced meaning and escape from the text, context and *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*.⁴

An Islamic economic approach is also used in understanding hadith, especially to hoarding wealth (*al-iḥtikār*) through eleven methods, namely determining the theme of hadith, examining the quality of hadith, tracking *asbāb wurūd al-ḥadīṣ*, using linguistic analysis and related economic concepts, using meaning of hadith by looking at its variables and indicators, using

Vagelpohl (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2011); Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, ed. James E. Montgomery, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006); Muhammad Akmaluddin, "Social and Cultural Relations in Islamic Law in Javanese Context: KH. Bisri Musthofa's Thoughts on Qur'an and Hadith Issues," *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 21, no. 2 (October 31, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v21i2.2355>.

² John E. Wansbrough, "Res Ipsa Loquitur: History and Mimesis," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. Herbert Berg, *Islamic History and Civilization* 49 (Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), 4–19; Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 37 (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³ Brockopp, *Muhammad's Heirs*; Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Caliphs: The Biblical Foundations of The Umayyad Authority," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. Herbert Berg, *Islamic History and Civilization* 49 (Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), 74–99; Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions"; Harald Motzki, "The Muṣannaf of 'Abd Al-Razzāq al-San'ānī as a Source of Authentic Aḥādīth of the First Century A. H.," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50, no. 1 (1991): 1–21.

⁴ Abdul Mustaqim, "Paradigma Interkoneksi Dalam Memahami Hadis Nabi: Pendekatan Historis, Sosiologis Dan Antropologis," in *Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dalam Memahami Hadis Nabi*, ed. M. Yusuf (Yogyakarta: Bidang Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2008), 1–27.

holistic-comprehensive (integrative and inter-connective) meaning, tracking verses related to the economy, contextual meaning and drawing conclusions.⁵ Understanding hadith related to environment must also use textual and contextual approaches, and using integrative and interconnected paradigm. So that the purpose of nature conservation can be achieved as ordered by the Prophet Muhammad.⁶

The understanding of hadith related to biology, for example in human reproduction, has to use thematic method and based on *ḥadīṣ ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan*. Understanding hadith on human reproduction with a biological approach is very useful for following the development of science and technology.⁷ Hadith related to the determination of Ramaḍān, ʿĪd al-Fiṭr and ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā also cannot be understood textually. This hadith really needs the help of physics and astronomy so that the worship based on Hijriyyah calendar can be carried out properly.⁸

There are also approaches and researches on how certain people's reception of a hadith is.⁹ People's reception on hadith is a dynamic process, which differs from one region to another. Each region has its own characteristics in receiving, understanding and practising hadith. Unfortunately, the study of hadith is only focused on theory and application, not including the deep meaning through the text. The study of hadith loses its spirit and looks for mere ideological interests. Many hadiths are studied in recitations and religious circles, but only to make a stamp of right and wrong, heaven and hell, reward and punishment and so on.

⁵ M. Yusuf, "Aplikasi Metode Tematik Dalam Studi Hadis (Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Pendekatan Ekonomi Islam)," in *Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dalam Memahami Hadis Nabi*, ed. M. Yusuf (Yogyakarta: Bidang Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2008), 29–55.

⁶ Suryadi, "Paradigma Interkoneksi Dalam Memahami Hadis Nabi: Pendekatan Historis, Sosiologis Dan Antropologis," in *Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dalam Memahami Hadis Nabi*, ed. M. Yusuf (Yogyakarta: Bidang Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2008), 57–78.

⁷ Nurun Najwah, "Reproduksi Manusia Dalam Perspektif Hadis," in *Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dalam Memahami Hadis Nabi*, ed. M. Yusuf (Yogyakarta: Bidang Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2008), 79–103.

⁸ M. Alfatih Suryadilaga, "Pemahaman Hadis Tentang Ru'yat al-Hilāl Dalam Penentuan Awal Puasa Ramadhan, Hari Raya Idul Fitri Dan Awal Zulhijjah Dalam Konteks Sains," in *Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dalam Memahami Hadis Nabi*, ed. M. Yusuf (Yogyakarta: Bidang Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2008), 105–32.

⁹ Barbara D. Metcalf, "Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jama'at," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 3 (1993): 584–608, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2058855>; Suryadi, "Dari Living Sunnah Ke Living Hadis," in *Metodologi Penelitian Living Qur'an Dan Hadis*, ed. Sahiron Syamsuddin (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2007), 87–104.

Based on the above facts, studies of hadith are still limited to the exoteric dimension which consists of formal ritual and legal aspects. The explanation of the hadith is limited to the visible things and focuses on external aspects only.¹⁰ The understanding of hadith is far-reaching on its methodology and integration with other sciences, though it only uses an exoteric dimension. However, exoteric understanding is not adequate for reaching complete and comprehensive meaning. In esoteric science, well-known and familiar explanations cannot satisfy most people. They believe that behind what is obvious and seen in this world, there is something loose and undetected by consciousness and logic.¹¹ Therefore, an esoteric explanation is needed after the exoteric dimension. The esoteric dimension is an orientation guide to bring understanding of hadith to the inner world and as a recommendation to change the internal state of one's psychology and various religious works.¹²

Explanation and understanding must go into the esoteric dimension which consists of the moral aspects and metaphysical ideas of the text. Understanding the hadith does not end on one side, but continues to the other side, to reach complete and comprehensive understanding of hadith. The outer and inner dimensions (*al-miqyās al-ẓāhirī wa al-bāṭinī*) can be achieved at the same time without choosing or favoring one of them.¹³

By using a qualitative approach, literary research and content analysis, this paper will discuss how the development of exoteric and esoteric dimensions in understanding hadith and both relationship. There are three representative scholars: al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiẓī, al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-'Arabī al-Mursī, who were using to explain the understanding of hadith with its esoteric dimension.

¹⁰ See introduction of Huston Smith in Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Illinois: Quest Books, 2005), xxvii.

¹¹ Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, trans. Catherine E. Creeger (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1997), 11–12.

¹² Igor Grekov, "Psychology of the Exoteric: On the Specifics of Spiritual Work at the Initial Stage of Mastering Esoteric Knowledge and Experience," *E3S Web of Conferences* 210 (2020): 19013, <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202021019013>.

¹³ Hammis Syafaq, "Relasi Pengetahuan Islam Eksoteris Dan Esoteris," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 2, no. 2 (October 16, 2015): 331, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2012.2.2.331-347>.

B. The Exoteric Dimension of Hadith

The exoteric dimension is the outer part of a hadith text, which includes outward, language and fiqh meaning in its limited terms. Through this dimension, hadith scholars examine *isnād* and *matn* through the obvious aspect only. For example, the meaning of purification (*ṭahārah*) using clean dan purify water (*mā' ṭahūr*) is an exoteric aspect. The water must a liquid object, which is colorless, tasteless, and odorless. So what is meant by *mā' ṭahūr* is only water, as understood in language and terms, not water of life, water of tranquility or other metaphorical water. Although the meaning of water itself in language and terms is sometimes still not uniform, there is no significant difference in it.¹⁴

The study of how the meaning of hadith in exoteric dimension has been studied by many salaf scholars. For example hadith works by al-Imām al-Syāfi'ī (d. 204/819) in *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīṣ*,¹⁵ Abu al-Qāsim 'Ubaid bin Sallām (d. 224/838) in *Gharīb al-Ḥadīṣ*,¹⁶ Ibn Qutaibah (d. 276/889) in *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīṣ*,¹⁷ *Tafsīr Gharīb Muwaṭṭa' Mālik* by 'Abd al-Malik bin Ḥabīb (d. 238/852),¹⁸ *al-Dalā'il fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīṣ* by al-Saraqusṭī (d. 302/914),¹⁹ al-Zamakhsyarī (d. 538/1143) in *al-Fā'iḳ fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīṣ*,²⁰ al-Qarāfi (d. 684/1285) in *al-Furūq*,²¹ and others. They all tried to provide an understanding of the hadith sentences that were difficult to understand and adapt them to the logic of writing and discourse at that time. Without a comprehensive understanding, knowledge of the relationship of one hadith to another, language and grammatical vocabulary, essential and metaphorical meaning, background and contextualization of hadith with local culture and traditions, it is impossible for someone to understand the hadith sentences.

¹⁴ Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl al-Ṣan'ānī, *Subul Al-Salām Syarḥ Bulūgh al-Marām* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 2006), vol. II: 18-25.

¹⁵ Muḥammad bin Idrīs al-Syāfi'ī, *Ikhtilāf Al-Ḥadīṣ* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1990).

¹⁶ al-Qāsim bin Sallām al-Harawī, *Gharīb Al-Ḥadīṣ*, ed. Ḥusain Muḥammad Muḥammad Syaraf (Kairo: Al-Hai'ah al-'Āmmah li Syu'ūn al-Maṭabi' al-Amīriyyah, 1984).

¹⁷ 'Abd Allāh bin Muslim bin Qutaibah al-Dīnawarī, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīṣ* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1999).

¹⁸ 'Abd al-Malik bin Ḥabīb bin Sulaimān al-Sulamī, *Tafsīr Gharīb Al-Muwaṭṭa'*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin Sulaimān al-'Uṣaimīn (Riyadh: Maktabah al-'Abikān, 2001).

¹⁹ al-Qāsim bin Ṣābit al-Saraqusṭī, *Kitāb Al-Dalā'il Fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīṣ*, ed. Muḥammad bin 'Abd Allāh al-Qannās (Riyadh: al-'Ubaikān, 2001).

²⁰ Maḥmūd bin 'Amr al-Zamakhsyarī, *Al-Fā'iḳ Fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīṣ*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī and Muḥammad Abū al-Faḳl Ibrāhīm (Lebanon: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.).

²¹ Aḥmad bin Idrīs al-Qarāfi, *Anwār Al-Burūq Fī Anwā' al-Furūq*, n.d.

For example is “*nafas al-rahmān*” (breath of Allah) which is defined by the spaciousness of Allah,²² term of *jazar* (carrot) that referred to *iṣṭaflīn* in Syām and *isfīnārīyyah* (*zanahoria*, Spanish) di al-Andalus,²³ the position of the Prophet Muhammad as an imam, mufti, judge or ordinary person and so on that referred as *taṣarrufāt al-nabawīyyah*,²⁴ and many other examples that can be seen in book of *musykil al-ḥadīṣ*, *gharīb al-ḥadīṣ*, *mukhtalif al-ḥadīṣ* and hadith commentaries.²⁵

This understanding was then continued systematically by Muḥammad al-Ghazālī,²⁶ Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī,²⁷ M. Syuhudi Isma’il,²⁸ and so on.²⁹ Al-Qaraḍāwī for example explained how to understand and deal with hadith. He said that understanding hadith must fulfill these requirements: according to the instructions of the Qur’an, conducting a thematic hadith study, completing some hadiths that seem contradictory, understanding the hadith according to *asbāb al-wurūd* and the situation, condition, background and purpose, distinguishing between *wasīlah* (instrument) which is not permanent and

²² al-Dīnawarī, *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīṣ*, 307.

²³ al-Sulamī, *Tafsīr Gharīb Al-Muwaṭṭa’*, I: 372; Muhammad Akmaluddin, “The Epistemology of Sharḥ Hadith in Al-Andalus in the Second to the Third Century AH: A Book Study of Tafsīr Gharīb Almuwaṭṭa by ‘Abd Al-Malik Bin Ḥabīb,” *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 26, no. 2 (2018): 113–29, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v26i2.5374>.

²⁴ al-Qarāfī, *Al-Furūq*, I: 205.

²⁵ Some scholars have different divisions on *taṣarrufāt al-nabawīyyah* (the behaviors of the Prophet). Ibn Qutaibah in *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīṣ* divided it into *tasyrī’* which is mandatory for all people, a pure revelation, a revelation which were left to the Prophet as an easiness (*tarakhkhus*) in it and the choice of the sunnah that could push the ascent degrees and perfects without being obliged. Al-Qarāfī in *al-Furūq* divided it into *tablīgh*, *fatwā*, decisions (*qaḍā’*) and leadership. Ibn al-Qayyim in *Zād al-Ma’ād* divides it into matters where there is no intervention or opinion of the Prophet such as revelation and matters in which there is intervention and his opinion such as war strategies and deliberation. Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī in *Hujjah Allāh al-Bālighah* divided it into *tablīgh* and treatise (*risālah*), some of which are based on revelation, some are not, and which are not related to *tablīgh* and *risālah* such as in the case of gardening and medical treatment. Al-Ṭāhir bin ‘Āsyur in *Maqāṣid al-Syarī’ah al-Islāmīyyah* divided it into *tasyrī’*, *fatwā*, *qaḍā’*, leadership, guidance, peace, deliberation, advice, perfecting the soul, teaching the high essence, ethics and neutral from guidance. See in Muhammad Maḥmūd Abū Lail, “Al-Siyāsah al-Syarī’iyah Fī Taṣarrufāt al-Rasūl Ṣallā Allāh ‘alaihi Wa Sallama al-Māliyah Wa al-Iqtisādiyyah” (Ph.D., Jordan, Jordan University, 2005), 33–37.

²⁶ Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyyah Baina Ahl al-Fiqh Wa Ahl al-Ḥadīṣ* (Kairo: Dār al-Syurūq, 1989).

²⁷ Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kaifa Nata’amal Ma’a al-Sunnah* (USA: al-Ma’had al-Ālamī li al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1990).

²⁸ Muhammad Syuhudi Isma’il, *Hadis Nabi Yang Tekstual Dan Kontekstual: Telaah Memahami Ma’ani al-Hadits Tentang Ajaran Islam Yang Universal, Temporal, Dan Lokal* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 2009).

²⁹ These three figures had a close and continuous genealogy of thought. This can be proven in al-Ghazālī’s writings which were not yet systematic, then refined and systematized by al-Qaraḍāwī and then detailed and structured by M. Syuhudi Ismail.

ghāyah (purpose) that does not change, distinguishing the true and metaphorical meaning (*al-ma'nā al-ḥaqīqī wa al-majāzī*), distinguishing between the supernatural (*ghaib*) and the real (*al-syahādah*) and ascertaining the meaning of the words in the hadith (*al-ta'akkud min madlūlat alfāz al-ḥadīṣ*). In closing the book, he also encouraged new explanations and understandings related to the meaning of hadith to suit the development of science and technology. Popular term and language, and easy understanding that accordance with recent logic and discourse are expected to be able to explain the hidden meanings of hadith and the expected goals.³⁰

The exoteric dimension is a systematic basis in looking for surface meaning of hadith. It is also a gateway to enter deep meanings that have not been previously revealed. Understanding hadith with an esoteric dimension is something that must be taken.

C. The Esoteric Dimension of Hadith

While the esoteric dimension is inner meaning of the hadith, which includes the unspeakable, the essential and the signal meaning. Hadith scholars discuss *isnād* and *matn* using the hidden aspects in the various wisdoms and symbols from hadith sentences. Therefore, this hadith understanding is not enough with intellectual ability only, but it requires reflection, contemplation, journey of life and closeness to Allah. Through this dimension, some of the companions of Prophet captured meanings that were not visible in hadith.

It is not surprising that the hadith that contain morality (*akhlāq*) are dominated by sacred hadith (*ḥadīṣ qudsī*). The closeness of meaning desired by Allah and the Messenger of Allah, as well as his followers, is manifested in the *ḥadīṣ qudsī*. The word of Allah has penetrated the esoteric dimension and was conveyed directly to the Prophet to emphasize the importance of morals over worship.³¹ If hadith scholars find that *ḥadīṣ qudsī* which contains morality is limited, they will look for it in the prophetic hadith (*ḥadīṣ nabawī*).³² They are

³⁰ al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kaiḥa Nata'āmal Ma'a al-Sunnah*, 201–2.

³¹ Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, Foundations of Islam (Oneworld Publications, 2009).

³² The term of *ḥadīṣ nabawī* used here to distinguish it from *ḥadīṣ qudsī*. See the term of *ḥadīṣ qudsī* in Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn bin Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīs Min Funūn Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīṣ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 66–69.

more interested in *ḥadīṣ nabawī* which contains morality than other hadith as is done by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī (d. circa 320/932) in *Nawādir al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādīs al-Rasūl*.³³

If there is no hadith that do not contain morality, they try to draw the symbols of morality in it. For example purification (*ṭahārah*) when going to prayer is obligatory as said by the Prophet.³⁴ However, purification of the heart (*ṭahārah al-qalb*) when going to Allah when praying is more obligatory. Purification of the body from dirty (*najs*) is obligatory. However, if there something little that is difficult to purify such as soil under nails, then it is forgiven.³⁵ The most important thing is to purify the heart in front of Allah. If the body is pure but the heart is still dirty, one's prayer will only be a formality and a doing of obligations. That is why many people have prayed, but still hurt others with their action because of dirty heart. The dirty heart and actions will prevent serious and accepted prayers and other goodness (*fa kaẓālika al-faḥṣyā' tanhā 'an al-ṣalāh wa sā'ir al-khairāt*).³⁶

Therefore, Ḥujjah al-Islām al-Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* explained that *ṭahārah* consists of four levels. *First*, cleansing the body from *ḥadaṣ*, *najs* and garbage. *Second*, purifying the body from sinful and evil deeds. *Third*, purifying the heart from bad morals (*al-akhlāq al-maẓmūmah*) and disgusting ugliness (*al-raẓā'il al-mamqūtah*). *Fourth*, clearing all secrets (*sirr*) and other from other but Allah. This last level is owned by prophets and honest people (*ṣiddīqūn*).³⁷ Thus, being outwardly pure in the body is not enough. A person must always purify whatever is behind his mind so that he is truly pure both physically and mentally. Thus, inside his body and heart, there is nothing but Allah.

D. Looking for the Esoteric Meaning of Hadith

Searching for esoteric meaning (*al-ma'nā al-bāṭinī*) in religious texts has been done by many salaf scholars. In *tafsīr*, for example, there is Aḥmad bin

³³ Muḥammad bin 'Alī al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī, *Nawādir Al-Uṣūl Ft Aḥādīs al-Rasūl*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umairah (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, n.d.).

³⁴ See for example the hadith number 135 in Muḥammad bin Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar Min Umūr Rasūl Allāh Ṣallā Allāh 'alaih Wa Sallam Wa Sunanih Wa Ayyāmih*, ed. Muḥammad bin Zuhair bin Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Beirut: Dār Ṭūq an-Najāh, 2001).

³⁵ Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), I: 127.

³⁶ al-Ghazālī, I: 356.

³⁷ al-Ghazālī, I: 126.

Muḥammad bin al-Mahdī Ibn ‘Ajībah (d. 1224 H/1809 M) with his work, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Majīd*.³⁸ He interpreted the Qur’anic verse in two dimensions all at once. The interpretation begins by using exoteric meanings related to the meaning of sentences, grammar, explanations using Qur’anic verses or hadith, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and others. Then it proceed with the esoteric meaning, which contains the purification of the soul, cleansing of the heart, the ascent of the students (*murid au sālik*) and the opinions of Sufi scholars. This *double interpretation* is not intended to contradict and confront one dimension of interpretation with another one. The aim is accommodating two different sides or dimensions, combining contradictory meanings, bridging the binary opposition of the text and reconciling the two poles of interpretation.

Other works made by Ibn ‘Ajībah that including *double explanations* in grammatical and Sufism aspects as in his work, *al-Futūḥāt al-Quddūsiyyah fī Syarḥ al-Muqaddimah al-Ājurūmiyyah*.³⁹ The work was later shortened (*ikhtisār*) ‘Abd al-Qādir bin Aḥmad al-Kūhinī.⁴⁰ Another scholar who did the same was ‘Alī bin Abī Bakr Ibn Maimūn al-Qurasyī al-Maghribī (w. 917/1511) with his work, *Naḥw al-Qalb Syarḥ al-Ājurūmiyyah*.⁴¹

While the meaning which is only esoteric is carried out by Ibn al-‘Arabī (w. 638/1240) in his work, *Raḥmah min al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr wa Isyārāt al-Qur’ān*,⁴² and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī in his work, *Taḥṣīl Nazā’ir al-Qur’ān*. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī for example, explained that one sentence can have many meanings, which they come from interpretation in one sentence. For example, the sentence *al-hudā* has eighteen points of view (*wajh*), where it is one sentence which etimologically means inclining.⁴³ He created a theme with certain keywords, then those keywords were interpreted with various

³⁸ Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Ibn ‘Ajībah al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Majīd*, ed. A. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurasyī Ruslān (Kairo: Dr. Ḥasan ‘Abbās Zakī, 1419).

³⁹ Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Ibn ‘Ajībah al-Ḥasanī, “Al-Futūḥāt al-Quddūsiyyah Fī Syarḥ al-Muqaddimah al-Ājurūmiyyah” (Manuscript, Riyadh University, 1400); Khair al-Dīn bin Maḥmūd al-Ziriklī, *Al-Ālām* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 2002), I: 245.

⁴⁰ ‘Abd al-Qādir bin Aḥmad al-Kūhinī, *Khulāṣah Syarḥ Ibn ‘Ajībah ‘alā Matn al-Ājurūmiyyah Fī al-Taṣawwuf* (Dār al-Ṭibā’ah al-‘Āmirah, n.d.).

⁴¹ ‘Alī bin Abī Bakr Ibn Maimūn al-Qurasyī al-Maghribī, “Naḥw Al-Qalb Syarḥ al-Ājurūmiyyah” (Manuscript, King Saud University, 1400).

⁴² Maḥmūd Maḥmūd al-Ghurāb, *Raḥmah Min Al-Raḥmān Fī Tafsīr Wa Isyārāt al-Qur’ān Min Kalām al-Syaikh al-Akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī* (Maṭba’ah Naḍr, 1989).

⁴³ Muḥammad bin ‘Alī al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī, *Taḥṣīl Nazā’ir al-Qur’ān*, ed. Ḥusnī Naṣr Zaidān, 1969, 19–20.

meanings. One meaning is followed by one verse of the Qur'an and then explained with an esoteric aspect.

In seeking the esoteric dimension on understanding hadith, several scholars including al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī, al-Ghazālī dan Ibn al-'Arabī al-Mursī had done it. They did not specifically write books on understanding hadith with an esoteric dimension, but this can be found in their books. The understanding of the hadith in this paper is focused on the *ḥadīṣ ṣāḥīḥ* and *ḥadīṣ ḥasan*. The explanation is arranged hierarchically according to the year of their death so that the genealogy of their thoughts and contributions can be known.

E. Esoteric Dimensions of Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī (d. circa 320/932)

Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin 'Alī bin al-Ḥasan bin Bisyr, known as al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī, was theologian, Sufi and hadith scholar. One of his opinion was that *wilāyah* (guardianship) is better than *nubuwwah* (prophecy). He followed some concepts of signals (*isyārāt*) and revelation claim (*da'wā al-kasyf*) that rejected by legal scholars (*fuqahā'*).⁴⁴ He was persecuted from Tirmiz because of his two books, *Iṣbāt al-'Ilal al-Syar'iyyah* and *Kitāb Khatm al-Wilāyah*.⁴⁵

The understanding of hadith with an esoteric dimension carried out by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī in his several books, such as *al-Manhiyyāt*. The hadith regarding the prohibition of urinating facing the sun and the moon (*istiqbāl al-syams wa al-qamar 'inda al-baul*), for example, used the understanding that both are creatures and a sign of Allah's greatness. They are also a curtain (*kiswah*) for the light of the throne (*nūr al-'arsy*). So it is prohibited when one urinates facing the sun and the moon, in order to glorify both of them and *nūr al-'arsy*.⁴⁶ Thus, this is not only relating to the prohibition, but glorifying both of them and *nūr al-'arsy*.

In his *Nawādir al-Uṣūl*, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī also tried to direct the meaning of hadith to an esoteric dimension. For example, wearing sandals with the right side first and then the left side. The command is not only related to

⁴⁴ al-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, VI: 272.

⁴⁵ Muṣṭafā bin 'Abd Allāh Ḥājī Khalīfah, *Kasyf Al-Zunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub Wa al-Funūn* (Baghdad: Maktabah al-Muṣannā, 1941), I: 1.

⁴⁶ Muḥammad bin 'Alī al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī, *Al-Manhiyyāt*, ed. Muḥammad 'Uṣmān al-Khasyt (Maktabah al-Qur'ān, 1969), 33.

Sunnah, but also various aspects. He said that the right side is favored by Allah and chosen by Him. The people of Paradise are on the right side *'arsy*, and the cheerful people are those who receive their deeds and books with the right hand, the angels who write down the good deeds are on the right side and so on.⁴⁷

Regarding the esoteric dimension of hadith, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiẓī explained that in the heart, Allah made the inner organs for sight and hearing. In the head, Allah made the outer sight and hearing instruments. What the head sees, his heart will be sure, his soul will be calm, his knowledge will be wider and his chest will be spacious. If a person sees or hears something that cannot be grasped by the external sight and hearing organs, then his heart will not be sure and his soul will not be calm.⁴⁸

Therefore, everyone needs proverbs (*amsāl*) to reveal something that is vague or invisible. The proverb is the mirror. With this proverb, everything will be clear, both to himself and to those behind him. That way, he will clearly see with his own eyes, which he had not seen before. Furthermore, his soul will be calm and can be directed by his heart. His soul will settle in the heart according to its place as the foundation functions for the roof of a house.⁴⁹

Thus, the exoteric dimension is the preliminary entrance to understand and build an understanding of the hadith text, while the esoteric dimension is the content and the roof of a house that relies on esoteric meaning. Understanding the hadith with the exoteric dimension alone is not perfect, while understanding it with the esoteric dimension alone will collapse because it loses its foundation and empirical things.

F. Esoteric Dimension of Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)

Zain al-Dīn Ḥujjah al-Islām Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Ṭūsī, known as al-Imām al-Ghazālī, was judge, *faqih*, theologian, philosopher and Sufi scholar.⁵⁰ He expressed concern about the

⁴⁷ al-Tirmiẓī, *Nawādir Al-Uṣūl Ft Aḥādīṣ al-Rasūl*, 32–36.

⁴⁸ Muḥammad bin 'Alī al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiẓī, *Al-Amsāl Fi al-Kitāb Wa al-Sunnah*, ed. Al-Sayyid al-Jamīlī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Zaidūn, 1987), 14–15.

⁴⁹ al-Tirmiẓī, 14–16.

⁵⁰ 'Umar bin Riḍā Kaḥḥālāh al-Dimasyqī, *Mu'jam al-Muallifīn* (Beirut: Maktabah al-Muṣannā, n.d.), vol. XI: 266.

decline in the exploration of the esoteric, the essential and the signal meaning (*al-ma'nā al-bāṭinī wa al-ḥaqīqī wa al-isyārī*) in the hadith. For example, when many people say that angels will not enter someone's house that has dogs, at that time, there will also be a justification that dogs are cursed animals and their owners will not be approached by angels. However, al-Ghazālī criticizes that they only focus on the exoteric meaning and the outward or textual meaning. They do not realize that the essential meaning is that human with dog's characters will be not entered by angels. Dog's characters in humans are more dangerous and destructive than dogs themselves. If the dog only serves the master and guards his house, dog's characteristics serve the fancy (*al-hawā*) and destroys the soul and spirit (*al-nafs wa al-rūh*) of human. Al-Ghazālī then explains what the mean of hadith *lā tadkhul al-malā'ikah baitan fīhi kalb* (angel will not enter a house with a dog in it).⁵¹

He said that *al-bait* (house) is the heart which becomes the house and the settlement of angels in man. Bad characters such as anger, lust, envy, jealousy, pride, self-assumption (*'ujb*) and others are like a barking dog. So angels cannot reside in the *al-bait* (house) of a person with a *al-kalb* (bad character).⁵² However, al-Ghazālī said that the explanation above is not the ultimate meaning or the original meaning, but as a warning to the outer meaning of birth (*huwa tanbīh 'alaihi*). If it is only based on the inner or esoteric meaning, then it is not enough as did by the Bāṭiniyyah sect. Al-Ghazālī says:⁵³

"...وفرق بين تعبير الظواهر إلى البواطن وبين التنبيه للبواطن من ذكر الظواهر مع تقرير الظواهر ففارق الباطنية بهذه الدقيقة فإن هذه طريق الاعتبار وهو مسلك العلماء والأبرار إذ معنى الاعتبار أن يعبر ما ذكر إلى غيره فلا يقتصر عليه."

"...and be the distinction between outward to inward expression, and between warnings for inward expression when calling outward

⁵¹ See the hadith number 83 in dalam Muslim bin al-Ḥajjāj al-Nīsābūrī, *Al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar Bi Naql al-'Adl 'an al-'Adl Ilā Rasūl Allāh Ṣallā Allāh 'Alaiḥ Wa Sallam*, ed. M. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turās al-'Arabī, n.d.).

⁵² al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, I: 49.

⁵³ al-Ghazālī, I: 49.

expression and assigning outward expression. The Bāṭiniyyah sect differs in this issue (because it only takes an inner expression), because this method (which is done by al-Ghazālī) is *i'tibār* (consideration) method which is the way of scholars and honest people, because the meaning of *i'tibār* expresses what is called to something else, not just on one side.”

From the explanation above, the exoteric and esoteric dimensions cannot be separated, especially when taking only one dimension. These two integral dimensions are practiced again by al-Ghazālī in the explanation of almost chapters in *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. For example, in the chapter on fasting, al-Ghazālī explained the hadith of the Prophet about many fasting people who only endure hunger and thirst (*kam min ṣā'im laisa lahū min ṣaumihī illā al-jū' wa al-aṭsy*). He explained, in the words of some scholars, that many people are fasting but are not, and many who are not fasting are actually fasting (*kam min ṣā'im muṭṭir, wa kam min muṭṭir ṣā'im*). *Muṭṭir ṣā'im* is those who keep their body from all sins but still eat and drink. Meanwhile *ṣā'im muṭṭir* are those who are hungry and thirsty but allow their body to commit sins. While the person who is *ṣā'im* and restrains his body from all sins, then he has reached perfection, namely combining the subject (fasting) with virtue (restraining his body from all sins) or *jama'a baina al-aṣl wa al-faḍl wa huwa al-kamāl*.⁵⁴

Therefore, according to al-Ghazālī, people are still obliged to fast in the month of Ramadan by restraining their bodies from all sins. The exoteric dimension of the hadith is fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the esoteric one is restraining the bodies from all sins. If one takes only the esoteric dimension (restraining the body from all sins) without the exoteric dimension (Ramadan fasting), then it is not enough as the understanding of Bāṭiniyyah sect.

G. Esoteric Dimension of Ibn al-'Arabī al-Mursī (d. 638/1240)

According to al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1631), al-Syaikh al-Akbar Zū al-Maḥāsin Allatī Tabhar Sayyid Muḥyī al-Dīn bin al-'Arabī Muḥammad bin 'Alī bin Muḥammad bn Aḥmad bin 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥātimī, known as Ibn al-'Arabī, was a Andalusian scholar who came to Masyriq in order to make a *riḥlah 'ilmīyyah*

⁵⁴ al-Ghazālī, I: 236.

(intellectual journey). He was a Sufi scholar, *faqīh* and follower of *Zāhiri* schools.⁵⁵ Ibn al-'Arabī was considered as a controversial figure, especially regarding the extraneous and the strange sentences (*ṣyaṭahāt*) and some of his opinions using odd formulas.⁵⁶ However, he continued to put forward the arguments of the Qur'an and authentic hadiths. Ibn al-'Arabī, as quoted by al-Ghurāb, said in his *Dīwan dan Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*: "*i'lam anna uṣūl aḥkām al-syar'i al-muttafaq 'alaihā salāsah: al-kitāb wa al-sunnah al-mutawātirah wa al-ijmā', wa ikhtalafa al-'ulamā' fī al-qiyās*" (know that there are three agreed sharia legal bases, namely the Qur'an, hadith and *ijma'* (consensus of the scholars), while *qiyas* is still in dispute).⁵⁷

Not much different from al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-'Arabī uses almost the same pattern. For example, he said that purification is divided into *ṭahārah ma'nawīyyah* and *ḥissiyyah*. *Ṭahārah ma'nawīyyah* is emptying the soul from bad and despicable morals, cleaning the mind from dirty and doubtful thoughts, cleaning secrets (*sirr*) from seeing others and cleaning one's own body from sins. While *ṭahārah ḥissiyyah* is cleaning of the body in the form of ablution, bathing and *tayammum*.⁵⁸

He also explains the hadith about Allah's closeness to His servants when remembering Him (*in ḡakaranī ḡakartuhū fī nafsi, wa in ḡakaranī fī mala' ḡakartuhū fī mala' khair minhu*). Ibn al-'Arabī said:⁵⁹

"...فإنك إذا أشعرت قلبك ذكر الله دائما في كل حال لا بد أن يستنير قلبك بنور الذكر، فيرزقك ذلك النور الكشف، فإنه بالنور يقع الكشف للأشياء، وإذا جاء

⁵⁵ Aḥmad bin Muḥammad al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ Al-Ṭīb Min Ghuṣn al-Andalus al-Raṭīb Wa Ḍikr Wazīrihā Lisān al-Dīn Bin al-Khaṭīb*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1997), vol. II: 161-184.

⁵⁶ The debate of Ibn al-'Arabī's controversies is due to the study of monotheism and the complicated and peculiar explanations in his books, which they should be intended for people who are on the same level of him as his friends and students, not others who have not reached that level. His critics and opponents also did not read the books and the logics used by Ibn al-'Arabī entirely and comprehensively. See the explanations of Maḥmūd Maḥmūd al-Ghurāb dan Muḥammad 'Alī Balṭah Jī dalam Maḥmūd Maḥmūd al-Ghurāb, *Syarḥ Kalimāt Al-Ṣūfiyyah Wa al-Radd 'alā Ibn Taimīyyah Min Kalām al-Syaikh al-Akbar Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī* (Maṭba'ah Naḍr, 1993); Muḥyi al-Dīn Muḥammad bin 'Alī Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Waṣāyā Li al-Syaikh al-Akbar*, ed. Lajnah al-Ta'līf wa al-Nasyr fī Dār al-Imān (Damaskus: Dār al-Imān, 1988), 5-9.

⁵⁷ Maḥmūd Maḥmūd al-Ghurāb, *Al-Fiqh 'inda al-Syaikh al-Akbar Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī* (Maṭba'ah Naḍr, 1993), 52-53.

⁵⁸ Muḥyi al-Dīn Muḥammad bin 'Alī Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, ed. Aḥmad Syams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1999), I: 498.

⁵⁹ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Waṣāyā*, 18.

الكشف جاء الحياء بصحبه، دليلك على ذلك استحيائك من جارك ومن ترى له
حقا وقدرًا."

"...If you feel your heart remembering (*zikr*) to Allah all the time, then your heart will shine with the light of that *zikr*. The light will provide revelation (*kasyf*). A heart with light will reveal all things. If that revelation happened, the owner of the light would be ashamed. This is a sign of your shame to (Allah) who is always by your side and who has the right and power."

On the other hand, Ibn al-‘Arabī said that the meaning of hadith with an exoteric dimension is not enough. In some hadith, the Prophet said that if a believer drinks alcohol, steals and commits adultery, his faith will come out when he does it (*inna al-īmān yakhruju ‘anhu fī ḡalik al-waqt ḡal al-fi’l*). Ibn al-‘Arabī mengatakan:⁶⁰

"...وتأول الناس هذا الحديث على غير وجهه لأنهم ما فهموا مقصود الشارع،
وفسروا الإيمان بالأعمال فقالوا: إنه أراد العمل فأبان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم
مراده بذلك في الحديث الآخر فقال صلى الله عليه وسلم: إن العبد إذا زنى خرج
عنه الإيمان حتى يصير عليه كالظلة فإذا أقلع رجع إليه الإيمان. فاعلم أن
الحكمة الإلهية في ذلك أن العبد إذا شرع في المخالفة التي هو بها مؤمن أنها
مخالفة ومعصية. فقد عرض نفسه بفعله إياها لنزول عذاب الله عليه وإيقاع
العقوبة به. وأن ذلك الفعل يستدعي وقوع البلاء به من الله فيخرج عنه إيمانه
الذي في قلبه حتى يكون عليه مثل الظلة. فإذا نزل البلاء من الله يطلبه تلقاه
إيمانه فيرده عنه. فإن الإيمان لا يقاومه شيء ويمنعه من الوصول إليه رحمة من
الله..."

⁶⁰ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḡāt al-Makkīyyah*, I: 506.

“...People interpret this hadith inappropriately because they do not know the purpose of the sharia. They explain faith by actions and say that faith is actions. So the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) explained his meaning in another hadith and he (peace be upon him) said: “If a believer commits adultery, then faith will come out of him until it is like a shadow. If he has finished committing adultery, then faith will return to him.” Know that the divine wisdom (*ḥikmah ilāhiyyah*) in this matter is that if a servant is going to commit a sin even though he is a believer, then he has indeed committed a sin. He, by his actions, has led to the happening of punishment and retribution from Allah on him. The reason is, his actions have caused trials from Allah to happen, so that the faith in his heart comes out and is only like a shadow. When Allah’s trials happen on him, his faith will reject him. Because faith cannot be fought with anything, and cannot prevent (it) from reaching the mercy of Allah...”

In the description above, Ibn al-‘Arabī explained that not only outward actions are interpreted in the hadith of the Prophet. But the associated mental action must also be explained. Someone who commits a sin, then not only will his faith come out, but he will get trials and punishment from Allah. With the release of faith from a person, trials and punishment of Allah will come to him because of the loss of faith which it is his shield. Therefore, he has mixed good and bad deeds and must repent and return to Allah (*taubah wa rujū’ ilā Allāh*).

Furthermore, Ibn al-‘Arabī explained that if someone already knows the exoteric dimension of a text (*al-adillah al-naẓariyyah*), then the next step is to look for an esoteric dimension that cannot be reached by mere thought. To seek the esoteric dimension, it takes practices (*riyāḍāt*), loneliness (*khalwāt*), struggles (*mujāhadāt*), escape from worldly dependence (*qaṭ‘u al-‘alā’iq*), solitude from creatures (*infirād*) and being closer to Allah (*al-julūs ma’a Allāh*). These methods must be accompanied by cleansing the space in which someone resides and the heart from the mental defects associated with creatures. That way, he will get an open heart and light from Allah so that it is easy to find the esoteric dimension.⁶¹

⁶¹ Ibn al-‘Arabī, I: 436.

From methods offered, three scholars have their own methods when looking for the esoteric dimension in understanding hadith. The methods depend on their spiritual and intellectual journey, works, dialectics and logics. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiẓī uses proverbs (*amsāl*), al-Ghazālī uses consideration (*i'tibār*) while Ibn al-'Arabī uses trainings (*riyāḍāt*) and struggles (*mujāhadāt*). Although using different terms, they agreed that the esoteric dimension must be based on the exoteric dimension. The detachment of the esoteric dimension from the exoteric dimension will cause the loss of the foundation of meaning and will fall into *bāṭiniyyah* sects.

H. Conclusion

Looking for the esoteric meaning of the hadith aims to look for signs or symbols in the hadith. In this case, hadith can be a source of creative imagination and inspiration to look for hidden or unspoken meanings in it. In the study of Sufism, hadith can be used as the basis for navigating the wide space of climbing towards Allah (*sālik ila Allāh*). Hadith can also be symbols of cleansing the heart, purification of the soul and self-controlling.

The exoteric dimension looks for the outer side and defines it, which is then used to find the inner side or the esoteric dimension. The esoteric dimension is used to find the inner side, extract the wisdom and essence of a hadith. Taking the exoteric dimension of hadith is important and fundamental, but practicing the esoteric dimension is also important and sustainable. By combining exoteric and esoteric dimensions, understanding hadith is expected to have formal legality and generate moral ideas. Therefore, the hadith does not lose the spirit of its meaning and at the same time maintains the sharia in it.

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