

Translator’s Introduction

In the efforts that you make,

Never settle for anything less than the essence .

The author’s advice to those involved in the translation of his works

About the Book

Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tihrani wrote this book, *Mihr-i Taban*, right after ‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s death in 1981. Ayatollah Husayni Tihrani – who also earned the honorific title of ‘*allamah* (most learned) – was among the closest and most brilliant students of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i in Qum. Not only did ‘Allamah Tabataba’i teach him philosophy, but he was also his first spiritual guide, who initiated Husayni Tihrani into spiritual wayfaring and gnosis. One can indeed feel the mystical light and the spiritual composure that are conveyed through the lines of this book. The close relationship and the long terms of acquaintance that the author had with ‘Allamah enabled him to write this unique work on ‘Allamah’s life and thought.

The book consists of two main parts. The first part includes an introduction and a memorial focusing on ‘Allamah’s life, and the second part is a series of discourses that the author had with ‘Allamah in person, written after having been tape-recorded. This latter part has been divided into several chapters based on the subject of the discourses (Chapter 3 onwards). They are presented in the form of questions and answers, and the topics of discussion are independent of one another. The discussions are heavily based on the Noble Qur’an, and that shows the extent of knowledge and familiarity of both the ‘Allamah and the author with the Holy Book. In other words, even though both scholars are among the top Shi’a figures of the twentieth century, the book is not based on Shi’a narrations in particular.

Readers not familiar with Islamic philosophy might find parts of Chapter 4 (Philosophical Discourses) slightly technical, but supplementary notes have been provided to clarify and summarise the discussions.

There is only one section under Chapter 7 (Scientific Discourses) on the science of *abjad* letters that specifically requires knowledge of the Arabic alphabet. The original text of the Qur'anic verses, narrations, and poems mentioned in the book have been provided in the indices for those interested. These indices are followed by informative notes on the prominent figures mentioned in the book. Diacritics were dropped from the transliterations throughout the text, except for the part on the *abjad* letters and a few other places where diacritics were absolutely necessary. However, a glossary of key transliterated terms with diacritics has been provided at the end to clarify any ambiguities.

The translations of the Qur'anic verses, narrations, and poems are by the translator, though he has particularly benefited from Arberry's and Pickthall's translations of the Qur'an. The quotes from the Qur'an have been referenced within the text. The first Qur'anic number is the chapter number (*surah*) and the second one is the verse number (*ayah*). The names of the poets have also been mentioned at the end of the translated poems. Other citations have been referenced in the endnotes, and have been mostly researched by the translator. Like many other Muslim scholars, the author used long annotations and honorific titles and phrases of praise. To make the work more coherent, some of these titles and a few parts of the book that were deemed to be less relevant to the main content were dropped or abridged in the translation. Among these parts was a small chapter on ethical discourses.

All website references listed in the footnotes were correct at the time of publication.

About the Author

Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tihrani was born in Tehran in 1345 AH (1926) in a family of religious scholars. He received his early religious education under the instruction of his father at home, and at the same time he pursued modern education and graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering from the German Technical School in Tehran. Despite his achievements in the modern sciences and the chance of continuing his education abroad, he chose the path of religious sciences, and thus he migrated to Qum for advanced studies in 1364 (1945).

He was among the first pupils of 'Allamah Tabataba'i in Qum. Not only did he participate in 'Allamah's regular courses on philosophy and Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) that were open to all, but he was also among 'Allamah's select circle of students who pursued theoretical and practical mysticism with their teacher and master (*ustad*). Sometimes the author would spend up to eight hours a day with the 'Allamah at his house, just like a family member. During the seven years of his stay in Qum, the author also studied under Shaykh Murtada Ha'iri, Sayyid Muhammad Damad, Sayyid Rida Baha' al-Dini, Sayyid Muhammad Hujjat, and Ayatollah Burujirdi.

After reaching the rank of *ijtihād*, the author departed for Najaf based on 'Allamah's advice in 1371 (1951). He stayed another seven years in Najaf, where he studied with Shaykh Husayn Hilli, Sayyid Abu al-Qasim Khu'i, Shaykh Aqa Buzurg Tihrani, and Sayyid Mahmud Shahrudi. Following 'Allamah Tabataba'i's instruction, the author sought spiritual guidance from Shaykh 'Abbas Quchani, and also

frequented Sayyid Jamal al-Din Gulpayigani. He also used to observe night vigils on Wednesday nights (nights of Thursday) in the Mosque of Sahlah.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i was authorised by his master, the late Sayyid ‘Ali Qadi, to serve as a spiritual guide on his behalf, and it was in this light that the author totally submitted to ‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s instructions. However, the author was yet to meet another student of the late Qadi in Karbala’, Sayyid Hashim Haddad, who had completed all of the spiritual journeys and had reached Divine Unity and Guardianship (*tawhid* and *wilayah*), just like the late Qadi himself. The author had heard ‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s respect and admiration for Haddad when he was in Qum, and thus he already had a great yearning to meet Haddad when he was departing for Najaf.

Finally, the author came to meet Haddad in a pilgrimage to Karbala’ – an acquaintance that eventually made another Haddad out of the author. Thus, he continued his spiritual journey under the instruction of Sayyid Hashim Haddad. The author also came to know and meet Shaykh Muhammad Jawad Ansari – who was living in Hamadan – and took spiritual guidance from him based on the instruction of Sayyid Hashim Haddad. In 1377 (1958), despite his willingness to stay in Iraq, the author followed the advice of Haddad and Ansari, and returned to Iran to head the Qa’im Mosque in Tehran. During his stay in Tehran, he kept his connection with his master, and visited Karbala’ and Hamadan several times.

During his twenty-three years in Tehran, the author actively sought social and political reform in order to bring about an Islamic society. He has expounded on his activities and his relationship with Ayatollah Khomeini in his book, *Wazifah-yi Fard-i Musalman dar Ihya-yi Hukumat-i Islam* (Tehran, 1410/1989).

After the Islamic revolution, in 1400 (1980), the author moved to Mashhad by the order of his spiritual master – Sayyid Hashim Haddad – and dedicated himself to teaching and writing. He felt that with the people’s revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, it was now the duty of the scholars to teach the people about real Islam, and purify the beliefs and practices of the public of that which is not genuine. That is why he freed himself of other affiliations for intense cultural and scholarly activities during his fifteen years of stay in Mashhad.

He was truly a prolific writer, covering a wide range and great depth of Islamic sciences, and truly deserving the title ‘*allamah*’ – as ‘*allamah*’ signifies one’s expertise in a variety of Islamic sciences, whereas Ayatollah signifies one’s expertise only in Islamic law (i.e. *ijtihad*). Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tihrani passed away in Mashhad in 1416 AH (1995). His funeral prayer was performed by Ayatollah Bahjat, and he was buried in Inqilab Courtyard (*sahn-i inqilab*) on the foot side and behind Imam Rida’s tomb.^{[1](#)}

Closing Remarks

At the end, the translator is most grateful to the Almighty Allah for enabling him to carry out this task. He is also grateful to the means by which Allah provided His grace – all the individuals who helped,

supported, and contributed to this work, particularly the friends and colleagues in Mashhad and London. May Allah accept this effort, forgive the mistakes and shortcomings, and pardon the translator and his parents.

It is apt to close with one of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s poems that is not mentioned in the book. He narrated:

When I was studying in Najaf, there was a disruption in my connection with Iran, I lost my means of income, and we had a hard time meeting the necessities of life. Our problems were further complicated by the extremely hot temperature during half of the year. One day, I went to see my master, Ayatollah Qadi, and opened up my heart to him. When I returned from his presence, I was feeling so light and free, as if I had absolutely no sorrow. There, I composed his advice as follows:

Struck by sorrow, that came like a thief,
My heart was torn by sadness and grief.
My master’s advice is that which I sought,
For him I described my sorrow and my thought.

He held in his hand the mirror of truth;
He was wise as an old, and fresh like a youth.
He said, ‘O, my son, enjoy and be free;
The world is passing, so this is the key:

Never ascribe existence to yourself,
Your being is vain like that of an elf.
Why be depressed for that which you miss?
You’re not the owner, so soar up in bliss.

It belongs to Him; He can take or lend;
In all you shall see the hand of your Friend.

Laugh if you want, or cry and moan;
The Decree is the same, it’s written in stone.

The Will of Allah is that which occurs;
The wish of your heart is not what occurs.’²

‘And my accomplishment is only by Allah; in Him I trust and unto Him I turn.’ (11:88)

Tawus Raja

¹. See Mu’assasah–yi Tarjumah va Nashr–i Dawrah–yi ‘Ulum va Ma’arif–i Islam, Ayat–i Nur (Mashhad: ‘Allamah Tabataba’i, 1427/2006) and ‘Notes on the Life and Career of ‘Allamah Tihrani’ (available at [http://www.ayatanur.com](#)); and lectures in Persian by the author’s son, Sayyid Muhammad Muhsin Husayni Tihrani (available at [http://www.ayatanur.com](#)). For a more detailed study of the life and works of the author in English, see the translator’s introduction of *Kernel of the Kernel* (Albany: State University of New York Press,

2003), which is another work by the author, translated into English by Mohammad H. Faghfoory.

[2.](#) 'The Life of 'Allamah Tabataba'i', .

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