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2. Memorial

My First Encounter with 'Allamah Tabataba'i

It was in 1364 AH (1945 CE) that I, this nondescript being, went to the splendid city of Qum for religious studies. I got a room in the school of Ayatollah Hujjat, later known as the Hujjatiyyah School, and started my studies there. The school's building was very small, and therefore Ayatollah Hujjat had acquired several thousand square metres of adjacent land to expand it. He wanted to build a great centre for the students, following the traditional style of Islamic schools. It would include many residential rooms, classrooms, a mosque, a library, a cellar, a water storage area, and other facilities in a suitable, healthy, spacious, and delightful environment.

The Ayatollah was not happy with any of the various designs proposed by the engineers from Tehran and elsewhere, until one day we heard that a *sayyid* (a descendant of the Prophet) from Tabriz had come and outlined a plan that had gained Ayatollah Hujjat's attention and approval. Thus I was eagerly anticipating seeing this *sayyid*.

Meanwhile, I was also very eager to study philosophy. At the time, the great scholar and philosopher Ayatollah Mahdi Ashtiyani had come to Qum and was intending to teach philosophy. He had been there for a few months and had promised one of our close friends to set up a private philosophy course for us based on the *Manzumah* of Sabzivari. We were just about to start that course when he suddenly changed his mind about staying in Qum and returned to Tehran.

Right about then, we found out that the *sayyid* from Tabriz who had come up with the design of the school was known as 'Qadi' and was an expert in mathematics and philosophy. We were also told that he had started a philosophy course in the *hawzah* of Qum. So my desire to meet him was further increased, and I was looking for some excuse to go to his house and visit him. Finally, one day, a friend of mine came to my room and said, 'Mr Qadi is back from visiting Mashhad. Let's go see him.'[1]

Thus we we went to his house, only to find out that we had already seen this 'renowned *sayyid'* in the streets. We had never realised that he was a man of scholarship, let alone *profound* scholarship! He

used to walk in the streets of Qum with an appearance and clothing that was below average: a very small turban of blue burlap, an open-front clerical robe, and no socks. Likewise, his house was very simple and substandard. We hugged, sat down, and started talking about various subjects. We were amazed by this man, and it became evident to us that he was truly a cosmos of knowledge, wisdom, and insight:

The man of knowledge, even as a loner,
A universe he is, sitting in a corner.
(Adib-i Pishawari, d. 1349/1930)

A course on philosophy by 'Allamah Tabataba'i

In that meeting, we developed a great regard and fascination for him and asked him to set up a private philosophy course for us so that we could discuss and debate freely and resolve our ambiguities. He kindly accepted. After we returned, I saw the fellow students who were also interested in studying philosophy.

'How was Mr Qadi?' they asked.

'In response,' I replied, 'I shall recite the poem that Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri composed regarding Sayyid al-Murtada, when he was asked the same question after visiting him:

If you ask about him, then you shall know:
Were there any flaws in him? The answer is no!
You'd see mankind in a man alone,
And the time in an hour and the Earth in a zone.'[2]

Thus he started teaching philosophy in the school's lecture hall. Even though the course was supposed to be private, other students found out about it; therefore, on the first day, the lecture hall was already filled with about one hundred students. Although the lectures consisted of many debates and discussions, the level of discussions was kept at average due to the large number of participants. Thus I used to walk him home after class and debate on the way in order to clarify further ambiguities.

And so my passion and enthusiasm for him increased. He was a simple and humble yet honourable man of good conduct. He was very friendly to us and used to treat us like a kind brother and a compassionate friend. In addition to the formal lessons, he used to come by my room every day to talk about the Noble Qur'an and other religious topics for one or two hours. Besides philosophy, he taught us a full course on traditional astronomy (*hay'ah*)[3] and also started a course on Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*).

‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s style of teaching

Gravity, grandeur and serenity were deeply rooted in ‘Allamah Tabataba’i. Streams of knowledge gushed from him like water from an active spring. He used to answer questions gently and quietly. Sometimes our debates and arguments would elevate in heat and intensity, but he was never affected by that whatsoever, and not even for once did he raise his voice higher than his usual pitch. He always maintained that courtesy, gentleness, tranquillity and gravity, and never lost his temper.

Sometimes he used to talk about the great men and saints (*awliya’*) and different schools of mysticism. He particularly used to talk in detail about his teacher and master of spirituality and divine teachings in Najaf, the unmatched chief of the mystics, Ayatollah ‘Ali Qadi (may Allah be pleased with him). These discussions were truly pleasant and interesting. In addition to his formal lectures, I used to meet him other times, and our meetings would sometimes take up to two or three hours a day.

My passion and zeal for him reached such a level that I moved out of my room in the school and rented a room near his place, in order to be closer to him and benefit more from his presence. He used to teach us ethical and mystical subjects on a regular basis, starting one or two hours before sunset, and sometimes going well into the night. In the spring, I used to meet him in Bagh Qal’ah – near his house – along with one or two other friends. He would talk to us about the manners and practices of saintly Islamic philosophers, the approaches of men of ethics, and the spiritual journey and wayfaring of the grand gnostics. He would especially discuss the states of the late Akhund Mulla Husayn-Quli Hamadani and his outstanding pupils such as Sayyid Ahmad Karbala’i Tihrani,[4] and others. He also used to talk in detail about the manners and styles of the late Sayyid ‘Ali ibn Tawus, Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-’Ulum, and also his own teacher, Mr Qadi (may Allah be pleased with them all). These discussions really helped us in our search for knowledge of religion. And indeed, had we not met such a great man, we would have been deprived of everything, in this world and the next. Thus all praise is to Allah and all great blessings are from Him.

Therefore, in addition to my formal courses at the school (*hawzah*) such as jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence, I was always committed to meeting with him and benefitting from his presence, whether in philosophy, ethics and mysticism, or Qur’anic exegesis, in which he had a novel style. This was the case until 1371 (1951) when I went to the noble city of Najaf to continue my studies and benefit from the city of knowledge of Imam ‘Ali (peace be upon him).[5]

While I was in Qum, we also asked him to teach us Qaysari’s commentary (*sharh*) on Ibn al-’Arabi’s *Fusus al- Hikam* and Mulla ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani’s commentary on Ansari al-Harawi’s *Manazil al-Sa’irin*, but he kept postponing that. We realised that he was not very interested in teaching these subjects, because every time, he would digress to elaborate on the verses of the Holy Qur’an. However, he taught us a complete course on spiritual journey and wayfaring (*sayr wa suluk*) based on the style and methodology attributed to ‘Allamah Bahr al-’Ulum,[6] which we found very exciting and pleasant.

‘Allamah’s Review of the philosophical and mystical letters of Sayyid Ahmad Karbala’i and Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Gharawi Isfahani

On weekends, ‘Allamah used to hold a session for a select circle of students, numbering from ten to fifteen, where he would discuss the series of letters between Sayyid Ahmad Karbala’i and Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Gharawi Isfahani (may Allah be pleased with them). He would first elucidate the subject matter, and the he would elaborate on his own view.[7]

The series of letters consisted of a total of fourteen letters on the unity of God’s Essence. There were seven letters by Ayatollah Karbala’i, who argued from a mystical point of view, and seven letters by Ayatollah Isfahani, who argued from a philosophical stance. The letters were written in response to one another, and each of these great men had used his utmost knowledge of mysticism and philosophy in order to disprove his opponent’s arguments.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i intended to write annotations on each of these letters and title his annotations ‘Reviews’ (*muhakimat*). However, he only did so for the first six letters and stopped when I left for Najaf to continue my education. On the several occasions that I returned for a visit, I requested him to finish his annotations, but he kept putting it off, and his tasks and illness prevented him from doing so until he passed away.[8]

He was a great man of Allah, not only in philosophy and *tafsir*, not only in understanding the traditions (*hadith*) and their real meanings – whether in religious beliefs or practices – and not only in his pre-eminence in other intellectual (*ma’qul*) and transmitted (*manqul*) sciences; but also in *tawhid*, divine gnosis, intuitions of the heart, mystical unveilings, and divine visions. The manifestations of God’s Essence were realised and established in every dimension of his soul. If one were to sit with him and observe his continued silence, he would think that the ‘Allamah was empty of all thoughts. But in fact he was so engaged in lordly illuminations and divine hidden visions that he could not descend from the height at which he soared.

It was incredible that, while carrying the load of divine mysteries, he observed all the outward practices in this world of multiplicity (*kathrah*) and did justice to both realms. The elevation of his soul did not impede him from carrying out his duties in teaching and training students, nor did it stop him from defending the precinct of the religion, its divine rituals, the sacred laws of Islam, and the Divine Universal Guardianship (*al-wilayat al-kulliyyah al- ilahiyyah*) of the Shi’a Imams.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s eminence in knowledge and practice

Not only was Ayatollah ‘Allamah Tabataba’i a man of outstanding knowledge, but he was also a man of practice. His actions were based on spiritual emanations and inner purity. He had combined in himself

scientific and intellectual merits, intuitions of the heart and conscience, and practical virtues of the bodily limbs. He was a man of truth; every aspect of his being demonstrated and had realised the truth.

His calligraphy was among the finest. In the last years of his life, his writing was disturbed due to his trembling hand because of the weakness of his nervous system; but, even then, his writing demonstrated his expertise in this art. He once said, 'When I look at some of my writings from my youth, I wonder, "Is this my handwriting?"'

Among the occult sciences, he was adept in geomancy (*raml*) and the science of letters (*jafr*), but he was never seen practicing them. He was also a real expert in the science of numbers (*'ilm al-a'dad*) and the different methods of counting numbers using *abjad* letters.

Moreover, he was a master of traditional astronomy (*hay'ah*), to the extent that he could easily create a calendar, and as already mentioned, he taught us a complete course on the subject. Furthermore, he was well-versed in algebra, geometry, and arithmetic. But since I had fully studied mathematics – including arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry, and so on – in modern schools, there was no need for me to re-study them with him.

He had studied mathematics in Najaf with Sayyid Abu al-Qasim Khunsari,[9] one of the great mathematicians of his time. According to 'Allamah, 'Sometimes when the professors of mathematics at Baghdad University faced a problem that they could not solve, they used to come to Najaf and ask Sayyid Abu al-Qasim to solve it.'

In addition, 'Allamah Tabataba'i was an expert in Arabic literature, semantics (*ma'ani*), eloquence (*bayan*) and rhetoric (*badi'*). He was an authority on Islamic law and principles of jurisprudence, with an accurate and progressive grasp. He had studied the two subjects for about ten years with scholars such as the late Ayatollah Na'ini, the late Ayatollah Gharawi Isfahani and also Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Isfahani.

His instructor in philosophy was the late Sayyid Husayn Badkubah'i. It was under his tutelage that 'Allamah – along with his brother, the late Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Tabataba'i Ilahi – studied philosophy in Najaf. They studied many texts including Ibn Sina's *Shifa'* and Mulla Sadra's *Asfar* and *Masha'ir*. The late Hakim Badkubah'i had a special regard for 'Allamah and paid special attention to him. He ordered 'Allamah to pursue mathematics in order to strengthen his intellect and demonstrative reasoning.

'Allamah Tabataba'i's spiritual master: Ayatollah Qadi

He studied ethics, divine gnosis, and *hadith* under the instruction of the unmatched mystic, the Sign of the Truth, Sayyid 'Ali Qadi (may Allah's mercy be upon him). 'Allamah followed his instructions in spiritual journeying and wayfaring, combating the base soul and asceticism according to Islamic law.

The late Qadi was one of ‘Allamah’s relatives in the noble city of Najaf. He was involved in educating and training devout students and those who eagerly aspired towards vision of the Worshipped One. In that region, he was the sole expert in this field, and so ‘Allamah used the term *ustad* (teacher and master) only in reference to him. It was as if compared to the late Qadi, all other teachers were insignificant, despite their knowledge and academic status.

However, if there was any talk of his instructors and teachers in public meetings, ‘Allamah would not name Mr Qadi due to his incredible respect for him. He would also not mention Mr Qadi along with other scholars. That is why there is no mention of Mr Qadi amongst the list of ‘Allamah’s teachers in his short autobiography, published in the introduction of the collection of his letters and articles, titled *Barrasi-ha-yi Islami* (Islamic Investigations).[10]

Likewise, in his autobiography, ‘Allamah did not write about his night vigils and worship in the Mosques of Kufa and Sahlah. He only writes that he used to pass many nights, especially in the spring and summer, studying until sunrise. This firstly shows how shallow and worthless it is to talk about one’s worship, night prayers, invocations and meditations in an article for a general audience – particularly from such a man, who did not take even one step toward fame or pride, and in whom all roots of show and egoism were burnt.

Secondly, this is in accordance with ‘Allamah’s emphasis on hiding the secrets as one of the crucial requirements for the spiritual journey toward Allah.[11] It would have not been justifiable from him to refer to his supererogatory worship while they were among the secrets between him and the Living Upright Lord! He obviously performed his obligatory morning prayer, although he never mentioned it in his autobiography; and so is the case with his other obligatory and supererogatory worship.

Nevertheless, whenever appropriate, he would not hesitate to talk about the late Qadi, alluding to him with a special honour and respect. For instance, in the prologue to his annotations on the series of letters between the two scholars, Ayatollahs Karbala’i and Gharawi Isfahani, ‘Allamah writes:

‘...Later on, he [Sayyid Ahmad Karbala’i] underwent training and instruction from the great master, Akhund Mulla Husayn-Quli Hamadani (may Allah send mercy upon his soul). He spent many years in the late Akhund’s company and surpassed the Akhund’s other pupils, becoming his top student [in mysticism]. He attained a high standing in both exoteric and esoteric sciences.

After the late Akhund’s death, the late Sayyid Ahmad Karbala’i settled in the noble city of Najaf, where Imam ‘Ali is buried. He engaged in teaching jurisprudence and also became an authority on divine gnosis and spiritual training. Many prominent scholars and righteous men launched into the path of perfection as a result of his instruction. They forsook physical and carnal obsessions, achieved the Eternal Abode, and became inhabitants of the Precinct of Intimacy.

Among them was the honourable sayyid, the Sign of the Truth, expert in jurisprudence and hadith, the original poet, the master of the scholars, the late ‘Ali Qadi Tabataba’i Tabrizi. He was born in 1285

[1868] and passed away in 1366 [1947]. He was the teacher of this humble being in mysticism, jurisprudence, *hadith* and ethics. May Allah elevate his rank even higher and pour his blessings upon us.'[12]

'Allamah's reverence and passion for Ayatollah Qadi

Truly our teacher, 'Allamah, had an intense zeal and enthusiasm for his master, the late Qadi. He sincerely felt small and insignificant compared to his master and found a world of magnificence, mystery, *tawhid*, and virtue in the late Qadi.

One day, I offered him some fragrance, which he took in his hand. Then he paused a bit and said, 'It has been two years since our teacher, the late Qadi, has passed away, and I have not used any fragrance ever since.' Even until these recent years, whenever I gave him a bottle of fragrance, he would cap it and put it in his pocket. I never saw him using fragrance, even though his teacher passed away thirty-six years ago.

It is also remarkable how 'Allamah and his teacher, the late Qadi, both lived eighty-one years.[13] 'Allamah Tabataba'i was born in 1321 (1904),[14] and passed away three hours before noon on Sunday, 18 Muharram 1402 (15 November 1981) – 81 years, just like the late Qadi. This is much like the case of the Messenger of Allah and his successor, Imam 'Ali, who both lived 63 years (peace be upon them and their family).

'Allamah's mystical education under the tutelage of his master, Mr Qadi

Our teacher and master, 'Allamah, narrated:

When I went to the noble city of Najaf for education, I used to frequently visit the late Qadi due to our blood relationship. One day, I was standing in the school [courtyard], when the late Qadi came passing by. When he reached me, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'My son! If you want this world, perform the night prayer (*salat al-layl*), and if you want the Hereafter, perform the night prayer!' This statement influenced me so much that from that time until my return to Iran, I kept the late Qadi's company day and night, for five years. Not even for a second did I neglect the opportunity to benefit from him. And from the time of my return to my motherland until his death, we remained in touch through mutual correspondence by mail, whereby the late Qadi gave me instructions, as the master-student relationship dictates.

'Allamah used to say, 'Whatever we have is from the late Qadi.'

The late Qadi was a great *mujtahid*,[15] but he was committed to teaching at his own house, where he taught several series of courses in jurisprudence. Moreover, he used to lead congregational prayers for

his students at his house, and his prayers were unhurried and took quite long. He used to pray the sunset prayer right at sundown, but the optional follow-ups that he used to perform before the night prayer (*'isha'*) used to take quite a time.

In the holy month of Ramadan his pupils used to gather in his house for the sunset prayer. Some of them used to wait for the red line to disappear from the sky (about 15 minutes) before breaking their fast. Thus they had requested Ayatollah Qadi to wait before performing the prayer. However, he had his samovar on and used to break his fast right at sundown.

For the first twenty nights of the month of Ramadan, he used to lecture for his students, and they had warm friendly gatherings. His students used to come to his house for the lectures four hours after sunset, and the sessions would last for about two hours. But there were no sessions during the last ten nights, and nobody saw him until the end of the month. Wherever his pupils searched for him – in Najaf, Karbala', the Mosques of Kufa and Sahlah – they could not find any trace of him. Thus was his style every year until he passed away.

Furthermore, the late Qadi was exceptionally talented in Arabic. It is said that he knew forty thousand Arabic words. He used to compose Arabic poetry with such excellence that even Arabs could not realise that the poet was non-Arab. One day Ayatollah 'Abdullah Mamaqani told the Qadi, 'I am so proficient in Arabic language and poetry that if a non-Arab composes an Arabic poem, I can tell, regardless of how articulate and eloquent the poem is.' Having heard this, the late Qadi started reciting parts of a long Arabic ode, within which he inserted some lines of his own which he composed at that instant. Then he asked Ayatollah Mamaqani to identify which verses were composed by a non-Arab, but he could not.

In addition, the late Qadi was highly competent in Qur'anic commentary and exegesis (*tafsir*). Our late teacher, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, related:

It was the late Qadi who taught us this style of interpreting the verses of the Qur'an by one another. We follow his method and style in *tafsir*. Moreover, he was very bright and open-minded on the traditions reported from the Infallible Imams. We learnt our method of comprehension of traditions, called *fiqh al-hadith*, from him.

The late Qadi's style in spiritual training

With regards to the purification of the soul, ethics, spiritual journey and wayfaring on the path of Allah, intuitions of the heart, spiritual unveilings (*mukashafat*), and genuine visions (*mushahadat*), the late Qadi was unique in his era. He was the Salman of his time, and the translator of the Qur'an [into practice]. He was like an enormous mountain, full of divine secrets, and was dedicated to training students in this field. He used to advise and guide a select group of students in his daily private sessions. A large number of eminent individuals advanced on the path of reality and truth and achieved exalted stations as a result of his instructions. They turned out to be among the righteous servants of Allah, with purified and liberated

souls. They were illuminated by the light of *tawhid* and passed beyond the realms of multiplicity and facades (*kathrah* and *i'tibar*).

Among them were our honourable teacher and master, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, and his brother, Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Ilahi (may Allah's mercy be upon them). They were partners and companions at every stage and station. They constantly supported each other and were always together, as birds of a feather flock together.

There were also many other great men who flourished under the late Qadi's instructions and supervision, such as Muhammad Taqi Amuli, 'Ali Muhammad Burujirdi, 'Ali Akbar Marandi, Sayyid Hasan Masqati, Ahmad Kashmiri, Ibrahim Sistani, 'Ali Qassam, and the late Qadi's honourable appointed successor, Ayatollah 'Abbas Hatif Quchani. Each of them was a bright star in the firmament of virtues, monotheism, and gnosis. May Allah reward their splendid efforts.

In divine gnosis, the late Qadi was himself a student of his father, Sayyid Husayn Qadi,[16] who was amongst the prominent students of the reviver and transformer, Ayatollah Mirza Muhammad Hasan Shirazi (may Allah's mercy be upon them). Mirza Shirazi was a student of Imam-Quli Nakhjawani, who was in turn a student of Sayyid Quraysh Qazwini.

It has been narrated that when Sayyid Husayn Qadi wanted to return from Samarra' (where Mirza Shirazi lived) to his hometown, Azerbaijan, Mirza Shirazi gave him a short piece of advice upon departing: 'Each day, reserve one hour for yourself!' Thereafter, in Tabriz, Sayyid Husayn became deeply engaged in spiritual matters. The next year, when some businessmen of Tabriz travelled to Samarra' and met Mirza Shirazi, he asked about Sayyid Husayn Qadi. 'The one hour that you had advised him,' he was told 'has taken up all his time. He is in intimacy with his Lord day and night.'

When the late 'Ali Qadi went to Najaf, he joined the circle of Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i and carried on the path of Allah under his supervision. In addition, the late Qadi associated with the pious ascetic, Sayyid Murtada Kashmiri (may Allah be pleased with him). However the late Qadi was not a pupil of his, but only accompanied him to benefit from his spiritual states and virtues. But in their approaches to gnosis ('*irfan*), there was certainly a great distinction between the late Qadi and the late Kashmiri.

In the spiritual journey, Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i followed the approach of his teacher and master (the late Akhund Mulla Husayn-Quli Hamadani), and that was gnosis of the soul (*ma'rifat al-nafs*). In order to achieve this gnosis, they stressed the importance of *muraqabah* (self-vigilance, watchfulness).[17] Akhund Mulla Husayn-Quli was a student of the exalted jurist, the late Sayyid 'Ali Shushtari, who was Shaykh Murtada Ansari's teacher in ethics (*akhlaq*), but his student in jurisprudence (*fiqh*).[18]

The mystical instructions of the late Qadi were based on the shariah (Islamic law) as well as esoteric and inner aspects of different forms of worship, like constant spiritual presence in prayers and sincerity in actions. Thus he prepared and purified the hearts of his pupils for receiving inspiration from the unseen realm.

He had rooms in the Mosques of Kufa and Sahlah where he used to observe night vigils by himself on certain nights. He also advised his pupils to perform night vigils on specific nights in these two mosques. Moreover, he had recommended to his students:

'In case you have an unveiling and see a beautiful vision while praying or reading the Qur'an, or at the time of invocation (*dhikr*) or meditation (*fikr*), or have any other vision of the unseen realm, do not be distracted; just continue with what you are doing'!

Our teacher, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, related:

'One day I was sitting in the Mosque of Kufa and was engaged in invocation when a heavenly houri approached me from the right. She was holding a goblet filled with heavenly drinks for me and was seeking my attention. Just as I was about to take notice of her, I suddenly remembered my master's advice, and thus overlooked and ignored her. So the houri got up and approached me from the left, holding out the goblet. Again I did not pay any attention to her and turned away. Thus the houri departed with dismay. Since then, whenever I remember that scene, the memory of that houri's disappointment troubles me.'

The virtues of Ayatollah Qadi

The late Qadi was an astonishing character in terms of his actions. The residents and especially the scholars of Najaf have witnessed fascinating stories from him. He had a large household and lived in utmost poverty, yet he was so much immersed in elevated stations of *tawhid* such as God-reliance (*tawakkul*), submission (*taslim*) and entrustment (*tafwid*) that his large household did not divert him a bit from advancing on the path of Allah. One of our friends from Najaf related to me:

One day I went to the greengrocer, where I saw the late Qadi bent over, handpicking some lettuce. But unlike what I expected, he was picking the wilted and undesirable pieces. I kept my eye on him until he gave the lettuce to the storekeeper to weigh. Then he hid the lettuce under his cloak and set off.

At the time, I was a young student, and the late Qadi was an elderly man. I followed him and asked, 'Sir, I have a question! Why did you choose the undesirable lettuce, unlike everybody else?'

'My dear son!' the late Qadi replied. 'This seller is an impoverished and deprived man, and I help him once in a while. But I do not want to help him by donation, so that first, he does not lose his dignity, character and honour; and second, so that he may not get accustomed to receiving charity, and thus not become indifferent and unproductive in his business. And it does not matter for us whether we eat soft and fresh lettuce or this lettuce. I knew that no one would buy this, and he would throw it away when he closes his store at noon.[19] Therefore I bought it to prevent him that loss.'

The late Qadi's merits are numerous, and discussing them here would involve a digression from the subject of this book.

The ancestors of the late Qadi and ‘Allamah Tabataba’i

From his father’s side, our teacher, ‘Allamah, is a descendant of Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba via Ibrahim ibn Isma’il Dibaj. And from his mother’s side, he is a descendant of Imam Husayn. Thus, he signed the books he wrote in Shad-Abad (near Tabriz) as Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Hasani Husayni Tabataba’i.

The chain of his ancestors is as follows:

Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, son of Sayyid Muhammad, son of Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, son of Sayyid ‘Ali Asghar, son of Sayyid Muhammad Taqi Qadi, son of Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali Qadi, son of Mirza Sadr al-Din Muhammad, son of Mirza Yusuf Naqib al-Ashraf, son of Mirza Sadr al-Din Muhammad, son of Majd al-Din, son of Sayyid Isma’il, son of al-Amir ‘Ali Akbar, son of al-Amir ‘Abd al-Wahhab, son of al-Amir ‘Abd al-Ghaffar, son of Sayyid ‘Imad al-Din Amir al-Hajj, son of Fakhr al- Din Hasan, son of Kamal al-Din Muhammad, son of Sayyid Hasan, son of Shihab al-Din ‘Ali, son of ‘Imad al-Din ‘Ali, son of Sayyid Ahmad, son of Sayyid ‘Imad, son of Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali, son of Abu al-Hasan Muhammad, son of Abu ‘Abdullah Ahmad, son of Muhammad al-Asghar (known as Ibn Khuza’iyyah), son of Abu ‘Abdullah Ahmad, son of Ibrahim al-Tabataba, son of Isma’il al-Dibaj, son of Ibrahim al-Ghamr, son of Hasan al-Muthanna, son of Imam al- Hasan al-Mujtaba, son of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon them).

Note that Ibrahim al-Ghamr’s mother was the daughter of Imam Husayn. Therefore the Tabataba’i sayyids (the descendants of Ibrahim al-Tabataba) trace back to Imam Husayn from the mother’s side, since Ibrahim Tabataba was a grandson of Ibrahim al-Ghamr.

The late Qadi was son of Sayyid Mirza Husayn Qadi, son of Mirza Ahmad Qadi, son of Mirza Rahim Qadi, son of Mirza Taqi Qadi. And Mirza Taqi Qadi (the great-great- grandfather of Mr Qadi) was also the great-great-grandfather of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i. The rest of the late Qadi’s line of ancestors is the same as ‘Allamah’s.

All of ‘Allamah’s ancestors were religious scholars, up to the fourteenth generation. His sixth ancestor, Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali Qadi was the supreme judge (*qadi al-qudat*) of the region of Azerbaijan. The entire region was under his authority in jurisprudence and legal decree. That is why he and his descendants became known as Qadi.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s brother and their childhood

‘Allamah Tabataba’i lost his mother at the age of five and his father at the age of nine, leaving behind only him and his younger brother, Sayyid Muhammad Hasan. Thereafter, their guardian managed their life just as it was before their father’s death, so as to prevent any disturbance to their affairs. He hired a maid and a male servant for them, and kept a constant watch over their affairs, until the two minors gradually grew up and finished their elementary Islamic education in Tabriz.[20] Meanwhile, they both

achieved considerable proficiency in calligraphy.

'On many days,' our late teacher recalled, 'my brother and I used to leave Tabriz and practice calligraphy in the nearby verdant hills, from morning until sunset. And later on, we set off for the noble city of Najaf together.' In all stages of knowledge and practice, these two brothers were together. They were such caring friends and companions for one another – in hardship and ease – that it was truly as if they were one soul in two bodies.

Ayatollah Hajj Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Tabataba'i Ilahi resembled 'Allamah in every respect. He was renowned for his knowledge, practice, forbearance, diligence, and truly ascetic lifestyle. He kept away from the captivated aspirants of this world. Instead, he maintained a status of meditation, presence and insight, found privacy and peace in solitude, and had bonded with the Majestic One. He was well-known for his power of intellect, his passion for the religion, and his devotion to the Household of the Prophet and following their path. He was also famous for his self-sacrifice in serving fellow human beings, particularly the helpless and the poor. All of Tabriz – and, in fact, all of Azerbaijan – identified him as an outstanding example of sanctity and purity.

'Allamah and his brother stayed in Najaf for ten years. Together, they diligently studied jurisprudence, principles of jurisprudence, philosophy, mysticism (*'irfan*) and mathematics. Then they had to return to Iran because of financial problems and disruptions in the earnings from their farm in Tabriz. Thus, they took up farming for nearly ten years in the town of Shad-Abad, near Tabriz, until their farm reached some stability in production. Then, 'Allamah immigrated to Qum to protect the *hawzah* against the ideological attacks that the students were facing, and his brother settled and taught in Tabriz.

Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Ilahi used to teach philosophy in the *hawzah* of Tabriz, based on Ibn Sina's *Shifa'* and Mulla Sadra's books such as *Asfar*. And whenever possible, he would assist eager wayfarers on the path of Allah, guiding them to their cherished destination. 'Allamah's brother, like himself, was a very simple, modest, and well-mannered individual. He had knowledge of divine mysteries and people's insides and was also an excellent instructor.

'Allamah used to praise and admire him frequently and had a special passion and affection for him. 'In the noble city of Najaf,' 'Allamah said once, 'we got hold of a manuscript of the Book of Logic (*Mantiq*) of Ibn Sina's *Shifa'*, which had not been published yet. Together, we made a handwritten copy of the whole text.' He also said:

'My brother authored a book on the impact of different sounds and tunes on the soul, how lullabies cause children to fall asleep, and generally on the wonders and spiritual aspects of the world of music. Frankly it was a precious treatise, and a truly original and unrivalled work up until today. However, after finishing the treatise, he feared that it might be exploited and misused by the wicked offsprings of worldliness, unjust rulers, and irreligious governments. Therefore he completely destroyed his work'.

I, this nondescript being, did not have the honour to meet Ayatollah Ilahi. Although he resided in Qum for

about a year, it was during the years of my study in the noble city of Najaf. Once I returned to Qum, he had returned to Tabriz, and he passed away after a few years. His body was brought to Qum and buried near the shrine of Hadrat Ma'sumah in the Abu Husayn cemetery. His death severely impacted 'Allamah and intensified the problems with his heart and nervous system.

'Allamah's wife

His wife's stroke and subsequent death was also a cause of serious distress and further aggravated 'Allamah's condition. 'Allamah and his wife were very close. They had a pleasant life based on affection, integrity, and decorum. Losing her compassion and kindness was very upsetting for 'Allamah. His response to my letter of condolence bears witness to this. In that letter, he praises Allah many times, and repeats sentences like 'All praise is to Allah.' Nevertheless, he writes, 'With her departure, the pleasant and peaceful life that I had is over forever.'

This devout lady, who was also a descendant of the pure family of the Prophet, was Ayatollah Mirza Mahdi Tabrizi's daughter. Her father and his five brothers were religous scholars and were the children of the late Ayatollah Mirza Yusuf Tabrizi. 'Allamah's wife (may she be blessed) was named Qamar al-Sadat, and her family name was Mahdawi, since her father (Mirza Mahdi) was known as Mahdawi. She passed away on 27 Dhu al-Qa'dah 1384 (31 March 1965).

'Allamah described her as such:

'My wife was a very pious and honourable lady. We married before I went to the noble city of Najaf for my education. During those years [in Najaf], we used to make a pilgrimage to Karbala' every 'Ashura'.[21] One 'Ashura' day after we had returned to Tabriz, she was sitting at home and reciting Ziyarat 'Ashura'. She recounted, "Suddenly my heart broke, as I remembered how we used to visit Imam Husayn's holy shrine (*haram*) each 'Ashura' for ten years, but now we were not blessed with that grace anymore. Then all of a sudden I found myself in the *haram*, reciting the *ziyarah* while facing the noble tomb of the Imam, in a corner between the front and the head of the tomb. The details of the *haram* were just like before, except that as it was the day of 'Ashura', people had mostly gone to see the processions and groups of mourners and lamenters. There were only a few people standing at the foot-side of the Imam in front of the graves of the other martyrs, and some of the Shrine's attendants were reciting *ziyarah* for them. As I became aware of myself, I once again found myself sitting at the same place at our home, reading the rest of the *ziyarah*."'

This honourable lady is also buried near Hadrat Ma'sumah in the cemetery of the late Ayatollah Ha'iri Yazdi. On Thursday afternoons, when our teacher used to visit the deceased, he first used to visit her grave and then the grave of his brother.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s approach to philosophy

Our teacher was a deeply contemplative man. He would never pass over a subject easily and would not let go of an issue unless he had deeply inspected its every aspect and dimension. On many occasions when he was asked a general and simple question in philosophy, *tafsir* (Qur’anic exegesis) or *hadith* (tradition), he would not answer quickly with a few words and end the matter. Instead, he would pause a bit, and then discuss and analyze the different sides and aspects of the subject and the arguments for proving or refuting the issue, as if it were a formal lesson.

In philosophical discussions, he would not step out of the boundaries of demonstrative proof. And he used to clearly distinguish between arguments based on demonstration (*burhan*) versus sophistics (*mughalatah*), dialectics (*jadal*), rhetorics (*khatabah*) and poetics (*shi’r*). He would not leave a discussion without connecting all the arguments and conclusions to basic and established principles. Furthermore, he never mixed philosophical questions with matters of mysticism or spiritual intuition and vision. When teaching philosophy, no word of visions ever came up, and in this regard, he was totally unlike Mulla Sadra and Mulla Hadi Sabzivari.

When speaking on any discipline, he preferred to only use the topics and principles of that discipline, as opposed to mixing different disciplines. In fact, he was truly distressed by those who mingle philosophy, *tafsir* and *hadith* together, and by those who, after failing to prove their point by rational demonstration, resort to *hadith* and *tafsir* to prove their stand.

He sincerely admired the late Mulla Muhsin Fayd al- Kashani and maintained, ‘This man had embraced all sciences, and there are few people in the history of Islam with such extensive knowledge. Also, it is evident that he approached each discipline independently and did not intermix different fields.’ In his *Safi*, *Asfa*, and *Musaffa* Qur’anic commentaries, which are based on narrations, he never discusses philosophy, mysticism, or spiritual visions.22 One who reads *Wafi*, his book on tradition (*hadith*), would imagine that he was only a traditionalist (*akhbari*) who knew no philosophy. Similarly, in his spiritual and mystical works, he maintains the subject without digressing. At the same time, he was an expert in philosophy and a prominent student of Mulla Sadra.

‘Allamah’s philosophical views

Our teacher truly revered Ibn Sina and regarded him as stronger in philosophical arguments and demonstration than Mulla Sadra. Meanwhile, he was a proponent of Mulla Sadra’s philosophical approach in transforming Greek philosophy, and his new and original views in discussing subjects like the principality, unity, and gradation of being (*asalah*, *wahdah*, and *tashkik* of *wujud*). He truly valued the new topics and principles that Mulla Sadra’s discussions brought about, like the principle of the possibility of the higher realms (*imkan al-ashraf*), the unity of the knower and the known (*‘aqil wa ma’qul*), transubstantial motion (*al-harkat al-jawhariyyah*), temporal createdness of the universe (*al-*

huduth al-zamani), the principle that a simple reality is all things (*basit al-haqiqah kull al-ashya'*)[23] and other related topics.[24]

'Allamah Tabataba'i regarded Mulla Sadra's philosophy as superior to the others, and closest to reality. He admired Mulla Sadra's service to the world of science and philosophy by the philosophical topics that he pioneered, whereby he increased philosophical topics from two hundred to seven hundred.[25] In addition, 'Allamah extolled the fact that instead of merely following the Peripatetics, Mulla Sadra combined philosophy with inner illumination and vision of the heart. Moreover, Mulla Sadra matched both the intellectual and the spiritual with the teachings of religion.

In his books – including *al-Asfar al-Arba'ah*, *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad*, *al-Hikmat al-'Arshiyyah*, and many other works – Mulla Sadra has shown that there is no discrepancy between true religious beliefs, rational demonstration, and inner vision. These three spring from a single source, and confirm and reinforce one another. And this is the greatest service of this philosopher to the worlds of philosophy, religion, and spirituality. He opened the door and cleared the paths for those who are capable of reaching perfection and receiving divine blessings.

Although the root of this theory can be found in in the words of Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, Khwajah Nasir al-Din Al-Tusi and Shams al-Din ibn Turkah, it was this honourable, inspired, and pious philosopher who accomplished this significant task through his excellent method and original approach. 'Allamah deemed that he breathed a new life into philosophy and prevented it from turning obsolete. Therefore, our late teacher saw him as the reviver of Islamic philosophy.

In addition, 'Allamah deeply admired Mulla Sadra's renunciation of the world, his spiritual practices to bond with Allah and purify his soul, his lawful austerities, his solitude in Kahak (near Qum) where he engaged in cleansing his inner self, and his emphasis on the importance of purifying the soul over everything else.

Moreover, 'Allamah maintained that most of the objections made against Mulla Sadra and his philosophy were due to failing to understand what he really meant in his discussions. 'Allamah had his own opinions about some of Mulla Sadra's arguments; nonetheless, overall, 'Allamah considered him the reviver of Islamic philosophy and a first-class philosopher like Ibn Sina and Farabi, while he considered Khwajah Nasir al-Din Al-Tusi, Bahmanyar, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Turkah second-class.

Concerning *wujud* (existence, being), our teacher believed in the gradation of being (*tashkik al-wujud*).[26] He also believed in the gnostics' view of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) and did not consider the two views contradictory to each other. Rather, he saw that the latter expands upon the former, and that the unity of the gnostics (*'urafa'*) is consistent with the gradation of being.

He used to teach several series of courses in philosophy – from the *Asfar* and the *Shifa'* – in the *hawzah* of Qum, and was truly a prominent Islamic philosopher. In recent years, he taught a course on 'advanced philosophy' (*kharij-i falsafah*) for a select group of students, which resulted in the two books

Bidayat al-Hikmah and *Nihayat al-Hikmah* (*The Onset of Philosophy* and *The Closure of Philosophy*).[27]

Everyone, even his opponents, admitted that he was the sole expert in Eastern (i.e. Islamic) philosophy in the whole world [at his time]. It is said that thirty years before the Iranians realised 'Allamah's brilliance, the Americans had discovered him and appreciated him more. They wanted to move him to the United States to teach Eastern philosophy. Thus they appealed to the Shah of Iran (Muhammad Rida), and the Shah asked the Grand Ayatollah Burujirdi (may Allah be pleased with him) about it. Ayatollah Burujirdi conveyed their request to 'Allamah, but 'Allamah declined.

The need to learn philosophy

Many scholars argue that it is better for students to first familiarise themselves with the narrations (sing. *riwayah*) of the Infallible Imams and only then study philosophy. However, 'Allamah maintained that this view is just like the statement, 'The book of Allah is sufficient for us.'[28] Our narrations are full of deep and subtle rational topics that are based on philosophical and intellectual arguments. How can one enter the vast ocean of narrations without intellectual competence – which is achieved by studying philosophy, logic, ratiocination, and syllogism?

How can one reach certitude in faith, as opposed to following others or having doubts, merely through narrations? The narrations reported from the Infallible Imams are different from those narrations of the Sunnis and other sects and religions that are simple and comprehensible to everyone.

The students and companions of the Infallible Imams were at different levels of knowledge and intellect. Therefore the Imams varied their words according to their audience. Some of their narrations are simple and understandable by the common person, but most of the narrations concerning the fundamental beliefs and God's unity are quite difficult and intricate. They used to explain these complex concepts only to a small group of their companions who were proficient in argumentation and debate, and who used to challenge the opponents of the Imams using deductive reasoning. Now how can one achieve certitude (*yaqin*) without having a firm foundation in intellectual sciences, rational arguments, and different kinds of syllogism and demonstration?

To illustrate the point, we bring up one of such multifaceted topics: God's unity of Essence (*tawhid al-dhat*).

The verses of the Qur'an suggest the absolute unity of Allah

One distinguishing feature of Islam is its approach to God's unity (*tawhid*). Though it seems quite plain, it is extremely complex and not easily digested by other schools of thought. They have recognised and admitted a straightforward sense of *tawhid* all right; but in spite of all their lectures, writings and studies, their secular and religious scholars and thinkers have not achieved anything beyond the numerical unity of God's Sacred Essence.

This subject is among the most important themes in the Noble Qur'an; in fact, it is the root of all Qur'anic teachings. It illustrates the Qur'an's originality, and is the foundation of everything discussed in the Qur'an in terms of beliefs, ethics, and laws. Moreover, the Qur'an challenges other religions and ideologies on this very theme and invites them to debate. It disputes and opposes not only idolaters, dualists, polytheists, materialists, and secularists, but also the celestial religions that have been distorted and characterise *tawhid* in a manipulated and spurious form. The Qur'an argues against them and calls them to debate the nature of the unity of the Truth (*al-Haqq*; i.e. Allah).[29]

The Unity of Essence of the Truth, the Majestic and All-Mighty, is not numerical; rather it is absolute and strict. It means that He is Absolute Being and Sheer Existence (*sirf* and *mahd*). If one presumes this sense of unity for Him, it would be impossible to even imagine any like for Him. An Absolute and Sheer Being would certainly be boundless in every aspect: in having a beginning or an end, in Its Essence and Attributes, and in intensity, number, and extent. It is such that in any respect, any other being (*wujud*) that is assumed would again be within that Absolute Being, and this contradicts the other being's 'otherness' (*ghayriyyah*), separation, and independence. So 'Any second being that you assume besides Him will return and reduce down to the First Being.'[30] This idea is expressed in the narration:

[He is] One, but not as a number, [and] Upright, but without any support' [i.e. He is independent of all; rather everything else depends on Him and on His might and power].[31]

It is also evident throughout the Noble Qur'an. Concerning the Essence of God, Qur'anic teachings reject all unities of number ('*adad*), genus (*jins*), and species (*naw'*) – not to mention the Qur'an's strong opposition to the Trinity.[32] The *tawhid* proposed by the Noble Qur'an is such that with it, it would be wrong to even think of any plurality (*kathrah*), be it in His Essence or His Attributes. Any plurality that one assumes would actually be the selfsame One Essence. This is because God does not have any limits. His Essence is the same as His Attributes, and all His Attributes are identical (i.e. not distinct or exclusive) since His every Attribute is infinite, unbounded, and not confined or determined.

***…High Exalted be Allah from that which they associate* [*with Him*]. (*27:63*)**

***Be He Glorified above that which they attribute* [*unto Him*]. (*37:159*)**

This is why whenever the Noble Qur'an speaks of Allah's Dominance it first describes Him as One and then mentions His Dominance. It means that His unity is such that it leaves no justification for anyone to even suppose a like for him, let alone the actual existence of a like and partner for Him. Observe the following verses:

***… Are diverse lords better or the One and Dominant Allah? You and your fathers do not worship apart from Him but some names, which you have given them….* (*12:39-40*)**

Allah's Dominant Unity – which overcomes any partner that one assumes for Him – would leave nothing but some names for anything other than His Sacred Essence.

… Or have they set for Him partners who have created as He has created, and thus they cannot tell apart the creation of each? Say Allah is the Creator of everything and He is the One, the Dominant. (***13:16***)

… Whose is the kingdom today? It is Allah's, the One, the Dominant. (***40:16***)

Allah's Absolute Kingship (*malikiyyah*) does not allow for any owner (*m□lik*) other than Him, and brings the other owner and its possessions under Allah's Absolute Ownership.

Imam 'Ali's sermons concerning God's absolute unity

The Master of the Monotheists, Imam 'Ali, has explained this sense of God's absolute unity in many of his sermons and speeches. There are many examples in *Nahj al-Balaghah*, such as:

Foremost in religion is knowing Him [God]; and the perfection of knowing Him is affirming Him; and the perfection of affirming Him is [to believe in] His Oneness; and the perfection of [the belief in] His Oneness is to regard Him pure; and the perfection of regarding Him pure is denying Him [extraneous] attributes. (Sermon 1)

All praise be to Allah, for Whom no state precedes another; so He is not First before being Last, and is not Apparent before being Hidden. Except Him, anything called one is little [i.e. its unity is numerical]; and except Him, every noble thing is humble. (Sermon 65)

All praise be to Allah, Who has proven His being through His creation; and has proven His eternity through the createdness [*huduth*] of His creation; and has proven that He has no similar through the similarities within His creation. He is embraced by the senses and is not blocked by the veils; because of the difference between the Creator and the created, and the Restrictor and the restricted, and the Master and the servant. He is the One but not as a number; and is the Creator but not through activity and labour. (Sermon 152)

All praise be to Allah, the Creator of people and the Expander of the earth, Who flows the streams in the lowlands, and grows abundant plants in the highlands. There is no beginning for His First-ness, and no end for His eternity. He is First and has always been, and is Everlasting and will always be. The foreheads are in prostration before Him, and the lips attest His unity. (Sermon 163)

He who describes how He is has not held His unity; and he who likens Him has not attained His reality; and one who typifies Him has not signified Him; and one who points to Him and imagines Him has not strived for Him. (Sermon 186)

And he has a sermon in response to Dhi'lab, who asked, 'O Commander of the Faithful, have you seen your Lord?' He replied, '[I feel] Pity for you O Dhi'lab! I would never worship a Lord I do not see.' This is part of a long sermon which contains precious concepts about God's absolute unity.[33]

And in another sermon he says:

His signs are what guide to Him, and His Existence is what proves Him. To know Him is to accept His Oneness, and [accepting] His Oneness is to differentiate Him from His creation, and his being different from them is in terms of attributes, not in being secluded from them . . . One whose total reality can be known is not a god. He [God] is the guide toward Himself, and bestows the knowledge of Himself.[34]

'Allamah Tabataba'i's discussion on God's absolute unity

'Allamah Tabataba'i has elaborated on this subject in detail in *al-Mizan*.[35] There, under 'Historical Study', he writes:

'The beliefs that the universe has a Creator and that the Creator is One have ever been subjects of discussion among thinkers. Human nature is such that it attracts one to these beliefs. Even the religions of the polytheists, if analyzed in detail, are originally based on the unity of the Creator, except that they assumed some assistants for Him: ***'. . . We worship them*** [***idols***] ***only that they may bring us near to Allah...'*** (***39:3***). But that original belief in God's unity was diverted later on and led to the belief in independent and autonomous gods, and thus Allah's supremacy was forsaken.

Human nature calls to *tawhid* (unity) and guides to a Single, Magnificent and Grandiose God who is not limited in essence or attributes. However, this natural and intuitive sense of unity came to be neglected, in lieu of which numerical unity was established in people's minds. This was partly because in everyday life, 'one' is a numerical concept. In addition, the religious and secular thinkers had to argue against the followers of idolatry, dualism and trinity. Thus, denying polytheism, which is a numerical concept, meant the reinforcement of numerical unity for God.

This is why the accounts of early religious philosophers – such as those in ancient Egypt, Greece, Macedonia, and so on – and those who came afterwards are characteristic of numerical unity of the Essence of the Truth. Even Ibn Sina clearly affirms numerical unity for the Essence of God in his *Shifa'*. And after him, up until about 1000 AH (17th century CE), all Islamic philosophers believed in God's numerical unity. And so is the case with the theologians (*mutakallimun*); there is not much beyond numerical unity found in their works. This is while they obtained all their arguments from the Noble Qur'an; that is, they did not infer anything other than numerical unity from the Qur'an. That was a summary of the views of the thinkers in this field.

The Noble Qur'an is the foremost source to address *tawhid*. However, this subject has been widely neglected by those who have worked on the Noble Qur'an, including the exegetes, the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (*sahabah*), their Followers (*tabi'in*), and the later generations. The encyclopaedias of traditions (*hadith*) and the books of exegesis did not reach the real meaning of *tawhid*; neither through Qur'anic discussions, nor through rational arguments.

We have not observed anyone clearly removing the veils and obscurities from this topic, except what is particularly noticeable in the words of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. Indeed his words have opened the gates to this subject and have uncovered it through the best, clearest, and most luminous proofs.

It is quite strange that after ‘Ali, people of philosophy, exegesis and tradition (*hadith*) did not address this subject until after 1000 AH (17th century CE). It was then that this subject reappeared in the words of Islamic philosophers, who themselves declared that they have got it from ‘Ali.[36] That is why we only mentioned some of ‘Ali’s words, because elsewhere, we do not observe similar discursive arguments concerning the Oneness and the Absolute Existence (*sirafat al-wujud*) of God’s Sacred Essence, the Majestically Magnificent.’

Then ‘Allamah writes in a footnote:

‘Hereby it is apt if the heart of the intellectual, knowledgeable, and thoughtful man misses a beat due to the shock from the claim of some scholars and debaters that these sermons of Imam ‘Ali in *Nahj al-Balaghah* were not delivered by him, but were rather fabricated and added by Sayyid al-Radi.

I wish I could realise how these could be unauthentic when the minds of the scholars could not grasp these subtle teachings even after ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib lifted up the veils from them and cleared the path to them. The human intellect could not achieve such a deep understanding through the many centuries that were to come. Except ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, none of the Companions or their Followers could carry this load, reach its reality, and comprehend it.

In fact, those who try to reject [parts of] *Nahj al-Balaghah* by considering it forged are clearly implying that the realities of the Qur’an and profound intellectual principles are nothing but general teachings comprehensible by the common folk. They think that such subtle facts differ from other general concepts only in terms of complicated terminology and eloquent expression.’

We quoted this discussion from *al-Mizan* to clarify that what is reported in the sermons and narrations is not commonplace humdrum material. Many of these topics require a strong power of reasoning and comprehension. It was based on this observation that our teacher, ‘Allamah Tabataba’i, deemed it necessary for one to strengthen his intellect, improve his deductive reasoning, and, more generally, study logic and philosophy. He considered the study of philosophy necessary as the sole guide to understanding the intellectual treasures of the Household of the Prophet.

Besides, the authenticity of our narrations is due to their rationality. Hence, only referring to the narrations and obeying them while forsaking intellectual reasoning involves a contradiction, and that is unacceptable. In other words, the reported narrations are not justifiable unless they are deductively established and comply with the intellect. And when it comes to the intellect, anything that is rationally proven should be accepted. Thus, it would be a contradiction if one adheres to the narrations but rejects intellectual arguments, for that is to invalidate the premise, which nullifies the subsequent conclusion.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s annotations on Bihar al-Anwar by ‘Allamah Majlisi

‘Allamah Tabataba’i truly valued *Bihar al-Anwar* by ‘Allamah Majlisi (my great-grandfather on my mother’s side), and considered it the best Shi’a encyclopaedia of traditions. He especially admired ‘Allamah Majlisi’s ordering of the chapters and topics, and the way he organised the sections of each volume, with each section starting with the relevant verses from the Qur’an, then continuing with the relevant narrations of the Infallibles and, if necessary, followed by comments and clarifications after each narration and also at the end of each section.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i maintained that ‘Allamah Majlisi defended Shi’ism and revived the narrations of the Imams. His knowledge, diligence, and scholarship are laudable, and his methods of discussion and proof and disproof in *Mir’at al-’Uqul* reflect the academic excellence of this knowledgeable jurist and his great efforts.

However, in spite of all his expertise and insight in the science of narrations, he was not adept in subtle questions of philosophy – as opposed to Shaykh al-Mufid, Sayyid al-Murtada, Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and ‘Allamah al-Hilli, who were among the Shi’a theologians that defended and safeguarded Shi’ism. Thus he erred in some of his assertions, and this degrades this encyclopaedia of Shi’ism. As a result, it was decided that for the new edition of *Bihar al-Anwar*, ‘Allamah Tabataba’i would review the book and add annotations wherever needed, so that this precious book may preserve its intellectual credibility.

The cessation of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s annotations on Bihar al-Anwar

This plan was carried out, and he annotated the first six volumes of the new edition. However, some individuals were not willing to accept his explicit rejections of one or two of ‘Allamah Majlisi’s stands. Thus, due to outside pressures, the person in charge of publishing the new edition asked ‘Allamah Tabataba’i to write less in certain cases and forego some of his objections.

But ‘Allamah Tabataba’i did not agree, and said:

‘In Shi’ism, Ja’far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq is more important than ‘Allamah Majlisi. So if ‘Allamah Majlisi’s discussions and commentaries result in intellectual and scientific objections against the Honourable Infallibles, we do not sell the Infallibles for Majlisi. And I will not reduce one word from what I see necessary to be written as annotation.

Hence, the remaining volumes of this precious book (*Bihar al-Anwar*) were published without ‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s annotations.[37]

Here we cite two of ‘Allamah’s annotations which led to the cessation of this task, and we leave the judgment to the readers and the scholars.

Two of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s annotations on Bihar al-Anwar

The first one is his annotation on page 100 of the first volume (Beirut, 1983), where ‘Allamah Majlisi provides several definitions for intellect (‘*aql*). ‘Allamah Tabataba’i rejects those meanings and explains:

‘One who is acquainted with this field would know that these definitions that ‘Allamah Majlisi (on whom may Allah have mercy) has presented as the conventional and established meanings of intellect are neither accepted by the experts in the field, nor by ordinary people.

There are two causes for his misunderstanding here. The first is his mistrust and negative view toward those who approach intellectual subjects through philosophical arguments and rational demonstration.

The second cause is his approach to the interpretation and understanding of traditions, which involves assuming all reported traditions to be at the same level, and that is the level comprehensible by the general public. And that is the level of most of the traditions reported from the Imams in their response to people’s questions.

But we know that there are also many noble concepts mentioned in the traditions, which point to certain realities that are only comprehensible by exceptionally bright minds and intellects. So the assumption that the traditions are all at the same level has mixed the brilliant teachings of the Imams with the more basic ones. Those outstanding assertions have thus been spoiled for having been degraded, and the more basic and simple topics have also been misunderstood, due to not being set apart from the more advanced ones.

But those who asked questions from the Imams were not all at the same level of knowledge and acumen. In addition, many topics may be taken at different levels of subtlety and precision. The Book of Allah and the Tradition (*sunnah*) of the Messenger of Allah clearly affirm that the teachings of religion have different stages, each stage relating to a certain group of people. Neglecting these stages will result in the loss of true knowledge.’

The second one is his annotation on page 104 of the first volume. There, ‘Allamah Majlisi argues that immaterial intellects (*al-’uqul al-mujarradah*)[38] are rationally impossible, and claims that only the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*) is immaterial. Thus he considers the philosophers’ discussions redundant and pointless here. He also proposes that the meaning of ‘intellect’ (‘*aql*) in the traditions might be the Light of the Prophet, from which the Lights of the Imams emanated. Here, ‘Allamah Tabataba’i comments:

‘The philosophers’ employment of rational arguments is not redundant or pointless. First, they have proven that the legitimacy of the external and apparent aspects of religion hinges on the reasoning

offered by the intellect, and the intellect is unbiased in its approach to rational arguments [whether they are religious or not]. Therefore if a claim is backed by rational demonstration, the intellect is bound to approve it.

And second, the external and apparent aspects of religion are derived from the apparent meanings of the words. But this is only a conjectural derivation [as opposed to certain proof]. Conjecture and speculation fall short of the assurance and certitude arising from demonstration.

Furthermore, employing intellectual demonstration to establish the fundamental beliefs (*usul al-din*) and then dismissing the intellect due to a few singly narrated traditions (*ahad*)[39] on intellectual topics is an instance of rejecting the premise based on the conclusion reached from that very premise. That is an obvious contradiction – and Allah is the Guide.

Hence, if the external and apparent aspects of religion contradict the intellect, they would first of all invalidate themselves, for their validity hinges upon the intellect.

For those who are not well-experienced in deep intellectual discussions, the solid approach and religious precaution (*ihtiyat*) would be to act based on the external and apparent meaning (*zahir*) of the Book of Allah and the traditions narrated by multiple paths (*mustafidah*).[40] They should leave knowledge of the truth of the matter to Allah, and avoid engaging in profound intellectual discussions – whether in support or opposition.

They should not support these claims because supporting them involves the risk of misguidance, and that entails permanent damnation. And they should not oppose them because that involves making a claim without [sufficient] knowledge. That would be to support the religion in a way that is not approved of by Allah. It also involves making contradictory claims, as one can see in the arguments of the author ['Allamah Majlisi], may Allah's mercy be upon him. Wherever he has made an objection against the experts of this field (of philosophy and intellectual sciences) on the subjects of the Beginning or the Resurrection (*mabda'* and *ma'ad*), he has himself made the same mistake or a bigger one. We will refer to instances of such contradictions as they come up.

His first contradictory claim is this very issue, where he criticises the philosophers of religion for claiming the existence of immaterial intellectual beings (*al- mujarradat al-'aqliyyah*). But then he affirms every aspect of immateriality (*tajarrud*) for the lights of the Prophet and the Imams. He does not realise that if it is impossible to have any instance of an immaterial being other than Allah, then merely changing the names of the immaterial intellect and calling it light (*nur*), nature (*tinah*) or similar names will not change the rule of impossibility.'

Those familiar with rational demonstration and deductive reasoning realise that every single assertion of this godly sage ('Allamah Tabataba'i) in the above discussion is logical and demonstrative. They will thus realise what he means when he says that adopting the external and apparent aspects of the narrations without being equipped with intellectual arguments is equivalent to the statement that 'The book of Allah

is sufficient for us'.

In Shi'ism, *ijtihad*[41] preserves the religion from becoming obsolete and outdated. *Ijtihad* prevents blind submission (*ta'abbud*) to certain ideas that are accepted and considered undisputable at one time, but whose flaws become obvious later on. Concerning the rituals (*ahkam*), if the words of anyone other than Allah, the Prophet, and the Infallibles are taken for submission by others (i.e. if a few individuals are given the right to extract rulings but not others) then that is blocking the way of *ijtihad* and results in the catastrophes and downfalls that Sunnism fell into [for closing the gate of *ijtihad*]. And it is utterly meaningless to be a follower in fundamental beliefs (*usul*), because the rule of both the intellect ('*aql*) and the narrations (*naql*) is that one must employ intellectual arguments for these matters. And 'Allamah's argument in the above annotation is something that all scholars agree upon (*ijma'*).

'Allamah Tabataba'i's effort to unite the philosophies of the Orient and the Occident

After completing a course of philosophy based on Mulla Sadra's *al-Asfar al-Arba'ah*, 'Allamah Tabataba'i sought to reconcile Eastern (i.e. Islamic) and Western philosophy. He held that if discussions are based on demonstration and valid arguments, it is impossible to reach different conclusions regardless of the school of thought that one comes from. Therefore we should look for the source of disparity between Eastern and Western philosophies and clarify it.

He believed that even though the natural sciences can be proven experimentally, one must investigate the causes behind experimental results. For example, one must explore why heat can be transformed into kinetic energy and move a mechanical device. Likewise, what features of kinetic energy make it possible to extract heat? And what is in mechanical energy that lets one obtain electrical energy by means of a generator and by setting the wheels of a machine in motion?

There are precise formulae for the transformation of one form of energy into another, but what causes these transformations? Furthermore, the empirical and natural sciences are based on experience, which does not conflict with philosophical sciences and intellectual arguments, which are based on reasoning and demonstration. Each of these subjects proceeds within its own boundaries without contradicting or interfering with the other.

For this purpose, he initiated certain meetings on weekend nights (Wednesday and Thursday evenings). These meetings were attended by a number of scholars, some of whom were acquainted with modern science. He also ordered me, this humble being, to attend.

The meetings were held for quite a long time, and they continued after my departure to the noble city of Najaf. At that time, the results of the discussions were going to be published in a collection called *Metaphysic*. But later on, some of our highly knowledgeable friends joined the group, such as the late Shaykh Murtada Mutahhari (may Allah bless him). Thus the meetings resulted in the publication of a

very valuable book named *Usul-i Falsafah va Ravish-i Ri'alism* (Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism).[42] It responded to many doubts, questions, and sophistries put forward by Westernised thinkers. Our honourable teacher (the author) sent the first and second volumes of the book to me in Najaf. The book had informative footnotes by the late martyr, Ayatollah Mutahhari, who had edited it. May Allah send mercy upon our grand teacher and our honourable companion (Ayatollah Mutahhari), and upon all of our friends from those days, by Muhammad and his pure progeny.

The composition and methodology of the al-Mizan exegesis

The approach of 'Allamah Tabataba'i to *tafsir* (Qur'anic commentary and exegesis) is that of the late Ayatollah 'Ali Qadi, 'Allamah's teacher and master in mysticism and divine esoteric sciences. It consists of interpreting the verses of the Qur'an based on the other verses of the Qur'an, which is to extract the message and meaning of a verse of the Qur'an from the Qur'an itself. The late Ayatollah Qadi authored a commentary based on this method, from the beginning of the Qur'an to Chapter 6 (Surah al-An'am), and he taught the Divine Book to his disciples based on this approach. Our late teacher, 'Allamah, repeatedly said, 'We have this method of commentary from the late Qadi.'

When 'Allamah was in Tabriz, he wrote a concise commentary on the Noble Qur'an, from the beginning up to Chapter 7 (Surah al-A'raf), and he used to teach *tafsir* based on that commentary and a collection of his notes. Later on, he decided to write an extensive commentary which would address all of the needs of the contemporary world and include historical, philosophical, ethical, social and tradition-based (*rawa'i*) discussions in a new style.

Allah honoured and assisted him with this task and he wrote *al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (The Scale in Exegesis of the Qur'an) in twenty volumes.[43] This *tafsir* was initiated around 1374 (1955) and was completed on the Night of Qadr, 23 Ramadan 1392 (30 October 1972). While writing al-Mizan, he used to teach it to the students at the hawzah of Qum, and many notable figures used to benefit from his lectures.

The merits of al-Mizan over other exegeses

The primary advantage of *al-Mizan* over other commentaries is that it explains the verses of the Qur'an with the help of the other verses. That is, it interprets the Qur'an by means of the Qur'an. This is according to many narrations that imply, 'Truly some parts of the Qur'an describe some other parts of it.'[44] The Qur'an is a single message because all of its verses were sent down from the same origin. Therefore the overall meaning of a verse is not confined to its position in the text. Rather, the entire Qur'an resembles one speech, delivered by a single speaker, and any two of its sentences could explain and relate to each other. Thus, if there is an ambiguity in the meaning of a verse, it will be clarified by referring to the other verses on that topic or similar topics.

This *tafsir* aims at obtaining the meaning of the Qur'an from the Qur'an before anything else, and sets

that as basis. Then, according to that basis, it assesses the plausibility of the other meanings proposed by the external sources. This is exactly the opposite of the approach where one sets his own impression of the meaning of the verses as basis and then tries to mould the Qur'an to one's own ideas. Many commentaries have followed the second approach. But in fact, they are not commentaries; rather, they are attempts to impose personal impressions of various meanings, external findings, narrations, and philosophical, scientific, social and historical ideas onto the Noble Qur'an.

It is evident that this method will cause the verses to lose their content and status, because then anyone from any discipline would attempt to tally their views with the Qur'an and prove their own ideas using the Holy Book.

There are many exegeses of this sort on the whole or parts of the Qur'an. But this approach is equivalent to distorting and disfiguring the Book; it is to kill the Qur'an and spoil its value. The meaning of the Qur'an should be obtained from itself, and this has been perfectly carried out in *al-Mizan*.

Among the other merits of this *tafsir* is that it considers the broad and general definitions of the terms and phrases, as opposed to the particular, earthly, and commonplace meanings that typically come to one's mind. It also distinguishes the secondary meanings and broader applications of a verse from its primary and apparent theme.

Among other qualities of *al-Mizan* is that in addition to Qur'anic discussions, it discusses various other topics such as narrations, sociology, history, philosophy and the sciences, each of which are presented separately without being mixed in with the other topics. And thus *al-Mizan* has adequately discussed the issues of the contemporary world and has addressed the prevalent ideas of our time. It has analysed their compliance with the sacred religion of Islam, identified their strengths and weaknesses, and explained their validity or invalidity. It thoroughly answers the objections and charges made against Islam by the atheists, infidels, and various Eastern and Western ideologies.

The Qur'an speaks of its own significance:

... Most truly it [***the Qur'an***] ***is a decisive word*** [***between truth and untruth***]. ***And it is not vain talk.*** (***86:13-14***)

And most truly it [***the Qur'an***] ***is a sublime book. Falsehood comes not to from before it nor from behind it;*** [***it is***] ***a revelation from One All-Wise, All-Laudable.*** (***41:41-2***)

Al-Mizan also defends the Shi'a school of thought through its profound and subtle discussions and by identifying the real position and implication of each verse. It clearly and rationally establishes the Universal Guardianship (*al-wilayat al-kulliyyah*) of Imam 'Ali and the Pure Imams. This is done through lucid and eloquent language, without the bigotry or fanaticism of the Age of Ignorance (*jahiliyyah*). It presents an incontrovertible and irrefutable commentary purely based on the verses of the Qur'an, and also using the narrations reported by the Sunni authorities such as Suyuti in *al-Durr al-Manthur fi al-*

Tafsir al-Ma'thur. It also points out the views of contemporary Sunni Egyptian exegetes (without naming them) and clarifies their weak points and mistakes.

Al-Mizan goes through ethical discussions in detail, but in gnostic ('*irfani*) discussions, it conveys a world of precision and subtlety in a short sentence. It stimulates the reader to strive for the vision (*liqa'*) of Allah and his original home. *Al-Mizan* unites the exoteric and esoteric meanings of the Qur'an and combines the intellectual ('*aqli*) and transmitted (*naqli*) sciences, where each plays its own role and has its own place.

Al-Mizan in Islamic schools and academic societies around the world

This *tafsir* is so fascinating, delightful, and appealing that can be presented to the world as a proof of Islamic and Shi'a doctrines. It can be sent to the adherents of other religions and schools of thought as an invitation to Islam and the Shi'a sect.

And indeed that is what happened when it was published: *al-Mizan* was spread around the globe. It reached Paris and the United States, in addition to the abundant copies that were sent to Islamic countries. It has been subject of studies and discussions, and has brought about honour and pride for Shi'ism in academic societies.

Al-Mizan is one of a kind in its extensiveness, addressing subtle topics, and standing against the verbal sophistries of the opponents of religion. One would be justified in claiming that such a *tafsir* has never been written in Islamic history. Our teacher was an expert in many sciences and inherited the knowledge of many true scholars. He had mastered various practical and theoretical disciplines. May Allah reward him and grace him with His blessings.

Thence, if he was amongst the intimates. Then [***for him are***] ***respite, superb provision and a bountiful heaven.*** (***56:88-9***)

I, this humble being, am acquainted with over thirty Shi'a and Sunni exegeses of the Qur'an. But I have never found any *tafsir* as sensible, delightful, and complete as *al-Mizan*. Given *al-Mizan*, one can more or less dismiss the other exegeses. I am not the only one claiming this; many outstanding scholars, distinguished thinkers, and people of erudition and research hold this view, either explicitly or implicitly. My close friend and fellow schoolmate, Sayyid Musa Sadr (may Allah liberate him from captivity and prolong his life) once told me that the matchless Lebanese scholar and writer, Shaykh Jawad Mughniyyah, said, 'Ever since I have received *al-Mizan*, my library has become dormant; [instead,] *al-Mizan* is always on my desk.'

Al-Mizan should be taught in the theological schools

One day, I, the lowest being, told my honourable teacher, 'This *tafsir* has not yet found its place in the *hawzahs*, and its real value has not been recognised. If this *tafsir* is taught in the *hawzahs* and they carry out ongoing debates, studies, reviews and analyses on it, then its value may be realised [only] after two hundred years.'

On another occasion I told him, 'When I study this *tafsir*, in certain cases where you deduce the meaning of the verses by linking them to each other like a chain and evaluating them with one another in a sequence, I can think of no expression save that the pen of revelation was writing through your hand!'

Thereupon he shook his head in denial. 'This is kind of you! I have not done anything!'[45]

'Allamah's other books include *al-Tawhid* (*Monotheism*), consisting of three treatises: (1) *Tawhid* (Monotheism), (2) *Asma' Allah Subhanah* (*The Names of Allah, Glorified is He*), and (3) *Af'al Allah Subhanah* (*The Actions of Allah, Glorified is He*). This book has been published in one volume, together with his treatise *al-Wasa'it* (*The Instruments*) and his book *al-Insan* (*Mankind*) which itself consists of three treatises: (1) *al-Insan Qabl al-Dunya* (*Man before this World*),

(2) *al-Insan fi al-Dunya* (*Man in this World*), and (3) *al-Insan Ba'd al-Dunya* (*Man after this World*). The volume is titled *Haft Risalih* (*Seven Treatises*).[46]

He also wrote the treatise *al-Wilayah* (*Guardianship*) which explains the last stages of man's wayfaring to the Threshold of the Worshipped One, annihilation (*fana'*) in His Essence, and attainment of the status of servitude ('*ubudiyyah*).[47] Another work is his treatise, *al-Nubuwwah wa al-Imamah* (*Prophethood and Leadership*). All these nine treatises are in Arabic. Among his books in Persian are *Shi'ah dar Islam*, *Qur'an dar Islam*, and *Vahy ya Shu'ur-i Marmuz?* (*Revelation or Mystic Consciousness?*).[48]

'Allamah Tabataba'i believed that true Islam had not been introduced to Europe and the United States. All orientalists who had travelled to Islamic countries had communicated with Sunnis, had only gone to Sunni countries, and had used Sunni books on Qur'anic exegesis and history. In hadith, they used the books that are found in major Sunni libraries, like the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari, Malik's *Muwatta'*, and the *Sunans* of al-Tirmidhi, al-Nisa'i, Ibn Majah, and Ibn Dawud. The orientalists had adopted these books as their reference for Islamic Studies, and had thus introduced Islam to the world from a Sunni point of view. Based on this approach, they viewed Shi'ism merely as a branch of Islam. Hence they had not studied Shi'a works in exegesis, history, tradition, philosophy, and theology. That is why Shi'ism had not been introduced to the world, even though Shi'ism is the only sect that reflects true Islam. Shi'ism is the real fulfilment of the Tradition (*sunnah*) of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family). The Tradition of the Prophet is reflected in the guardianship (*wilayah*), and thus Shi'ism is the only sect that has followed the Messenger of Allah. It is the true realisation of Islam in terms of beliefs and actions.

History books (and other books) of the Sunnis contain numerous points which can be criticised for their invalidity, misrepresentation, or distortion. In addition, certain matters have been ascribed to the Messenger of Allah that do not fit the character of a prophet, not to mention their denial of the Prophet's infallibility ('*ismah*). Thus, Islam has not appeared in the West with its true face, and that is why it has not caused the Westerners to incline towards Islam. But things are quite different in Shi'ism.

The Shi'a books view the Messenger of Allah as absolutely infallible and clear from all mistakes, sins, and slips. They do not ascribe anything to him that contradicts the status of a prophet.

Furthermore, according to Shi'ism, the Pure Imams are impeccable and deserving to be the caliphs and successors of the Prophet. On the other hand, Sunni sources – in history, exegesis and tradition – authorise allegiance to an imperfect, even unjust leader, and require others to obey such a leader. That is why the noble caliphate and succession to the Messenger of Allah turned into a great kingdom like the empires of Rome and Persia. The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs committed every offence and wrongdoing under the guise of being the 'successors' (sing. *khalifah*) of the Prophet. That is why the Europeans have not been attracted to Islam yet. They will definitely convert to Islam if they realise that the conduct of the caliphs was against the Tradition of the Messenger of Allah, and that Islam was in fact introduced to abolish these kinds of regimes.

'Allamah Tabataba'i's interviews with Henry Corbin, Chair of Shi'a Studies at Sorbonne

'Allamah Tabataba'i's interviews with Henry Corbin put 'Allamah to a lot of trouble, as he had to travel in ordinary buses all the way from Qum to Tehran only to meet with him. He did this to introduce the reality of Shi'ism, to reveal the genuine face of the guardianship (*wilayah*) of the Imams, and to present the characteristics of a true Shi'a.

These interviews were truly a significant service to Islam and Shi'ism, as Henry Corbin used to fully record the discussions. In addition to making the reality of Shi'ism known by spreading the discussions in Europe, Corbin himself truly defended and supported Shi'ism in his speeches and at conferences. He was wholly determined to introduce Shi'ism in Paris.

Corbin believed that the only genuine sect that had not yet expired was Shi'ism, because of the fundamental Shi'a belief in the existence of a living Leader (*imam*): Hadrat Mahdi Qa'im Al-i Muhammad ('the Guided and Standing Imam, from the family of Muhammad').

That makes Shi'ism the only living sect. The religion of the Jews expired with the death of Prophet Moses and that of the Christians with the ascent of Prophet Jesus, and that of the other Muslims by the demise of the Prophet Muhammad. But Shi'ism considers its leader and guardian alive and connected to the spiritual realm and divine inspirations.

Corbin himself was very inclined to Shi'ism.[49] He was significantly moved by his meetings with 'Allamah, and by the teachings of Shi'ism, especially the noble Shi'a belief in Imam Mahdi. According to 'Allamah, he frequently used to read the supplications of *al-Sahifah al-Mahdiyyah* and weep. Corbin's acquaintance and interviews with 'Allamah Tabataba'i started in 1378 (1959) and continued for over twenty years.

In a meeting that I, the lowest being, had with 'Allamah on 18 Sha'ban 1399 (13 July 1979), he said:

'It has been a few months since Monsieur Henry Corbin, professor of Shi'ism at Sorbonne University, has passed away. He had numerous meetings with us for his research on Shi'ism. He was an unprejudiced man and had a pure heart. He believed that among all religions in the world, only Shi'ism is thriving, active and alive; and the others, without exception, have exhausted their lifespan and do not evolve and progress.

The Jews do not believe in a living leader and director (nor do the Christians and Zoroastrians). They do not rely on a living source and are merely content to follow the Torah, Gospel, Zand and Avesta, and seek their perfection within these boundaries. And the same is with all of the Sunni sects, who view their perfection solely based on the Qur'an and the Prophet's Tradition. However, Shi'ism is an active and living religion. It maintains that the leader and head of the community should be alive, and one can achieve perfection only by reaching the sacred status of the Imam. This inspires progress, movement, and love'.

He added:

'One day I told Corbin that in the sacred religion of Islam, absolutely every land and every location is a place of worship. If one wants to perform prayer, recite the Qur'an, make prostration or supplicate, he can do so wherever he is. The Messenger of Allah said, "All of the earth has been made a place of prostration and source of purity for me [my religion]."[50] However, this is not the case in Christianity, where worship is limited to the church and to a specific time, and worshipping outside the church is not approved of.

Therefore, if a Christian person wants to call God at some time, say, in the middle of the night in his bed at home, what should he do? Should he wait until Sunday, when they open the church, so that he can go there for supplication? This cuts a servant's bond with God.

"Yes, this is an issue in Christianity," Corbin replied. "But *al-hamdu lillah* (all praise be to Allah), Islam has preserved the connection between the created and the Creator at every time, location and in every personal condition."'

'Allamah continued:

In the sacred religion of Islam, if a person feels like it, he can call on Allah right there. And since Allah

has [numerous] beautiful names (*al-asma' al-husna*) such as the All-Forgiver, the All-Compassionate, the Sustainer, the Vengeful, and others, one would call Allah with the attribute that he finds most relevant to his need and desire. For example, if he wants Allah to pardon him and forgive his sins, he should use the names of the All-Forgiver, All-Forgiving, and Forgiver of sins (*al-Ghafr, al-Ghaffr*, and *Ghfir al-dhanb*).

However, in Christianity, God does not have *al-asma' al-husna*, and is only referred to as God, the Lord, and Father. So what do you do if you want to call upon God through a specific name?

He [Corbin] replied, "I recite *al-Sahifah al-Mahdiyyah* in my prayers."[51]

'Allamah also related that Corbin frequently used to recite *al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah* and weep.

'Allamah's publications

'Allamah Tabataba'i's interviews with Corbin were published in four languages: Persian, Arabic, French and English. The first Persian volume was published as the yearbook of *Maktab-i Tashayyu'* and was reprinted the following year.

As of today, 'Allamah's books *Kitab-i Shi'ah* (*The Shi'a Book*), *Risalat-i Tashayyu' dar Dunya-yi Imruz* (*Shi'ism's Mission in Today's World*),[52] *Pursish-ha-yi Islami* (*Islamic Questions*), and *Islam va Insan-i Mu'asir* (*Islam and the Contemporary Man*) have been published. Another publication of his is the book *Hukumat dar Islam* (*Government in Islam*), originally in Persian but also translated into Arabic.

He also wrote a treatise on miracles (*i'jaz*), and a treatise titled *'Ali wa al-Falsafah al-Ilahiyyah* (*'Ali and the Divine Philosophy*), originally in Arabic but also translated into Persian. In addition, he composed precious glosses (sing. *hashiyah*) on Mulla Sadra's *al-Asfar al-Arba'ah*, which have been published in the latest edition of *Asfar* as annotations, totalling nine volumes. He also wrote glosses on *Kifayat al-Usul* (by Akhund Khurasani).

Finally, he wrote *Sunan al-Nabi* (*The Customs of the Prophet*) which has been published along with some additions [and Persian translation] by one of the scholars.[53] He also wrote the treatise *Burhan* (*Demonstration*), and many unpublished treatises on subjects such as abstractions (*i'tibariyyat*), sophistry (*mughalatah*), analysis (*tahlil*), and combination and derivation (*tarkib wa mushtaq*).[54]

'Allamah Tabataba'i's manners, ethics, and modesty

What I know of my friend, should I say or not?
What others know not should I say or not?

I hold many secrets in my heart and soul;
A bit of that many should I say or not?

The talk that I had with you the other day,
What about today, should I say or not?

Of the flower's beauty and the nightingale's love,
In the ears of the thorn should I say or not?

The traits of that who lives in this place,
All over the place should I say or not?

(Maghribi)

How can I write about our teacher's mysticism and ethics? What can I say about the person to whom I owe my life, my being, and my every breath? My knowledge of God, the Prophet, and the Imams is all due to his diffusions and grace. Allah gave us everything when He gave us 'Allamah Tabataba'i. No words can explain his exhaustive spiritual magnificence. He soared in the heavens at the same time that he carried out his worldly occupations.

He was most lenient and soft on us rash and impudent students. He used to accompany us like a tall father who bends, takes his child's hand in his own, and walks at the child's pace. He educated and dealt with each of us based on our personal talent, character, penchant, aptitude, and pace, be that fast or slow. His heart was filled with Divine Secrets, yet he had a smiling, cheerful, and open face, a silent tongue, and a soft voice. He was constantly in thought; and, occasionally, delicate smiles appeared on his lips.

Our dear teacher and master! After you, we must indeed say what Imam Sajjad said at his father's grave: 'After you, as with this world: it is dark; and as with the hereafter: it is luminous due to the light of your face.'[55]

This man was a world of splendour. He used to sit on the ground by the school's courtyard just like a young student. He used to come to Faydiyyah School around sunset, where he would perform congregational prayer behind the late Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi Khunsari, just like the other students.

He was so modest, courteous and observant of good manners that I repeatedly used to tell him, 'You have so much manners and politeness that this will make us rude and ill-mannered [toward you]! For God's sake, think of us!' For forty years until the time that he has passed on, he was never seen leaning on a pillow or cushion in any meeting. Rather, he always used to sit politely in front of the visitors, a bit apart from the wall, and in a lower position than that of the visiting guest. As his student, I used to frequent his house, and of course I wanted to sit in an inferior position than his, out of courtesy. But it was not possible whatsoever. He would stand up and say, 'In that case I shall sit at the entrance, or maybe outside the room!'

On one occasion many years ago, I went to visit him in Mashhad and saw him sitting on a pad, as the doctor had ordered him not to sit on the hard floor due to his heart problem. He rose up and offered me the pad to sit on, but I refused. So we were both standing for a while, until he said, 'Please sit down. There is something that I should tell you!' I obeyed and sat on the pad for the sake of politeness. He also sat on the floor, and said, 'What I wanted to tell you is that over there is softer!'

When I was in Qum, he never gave us the honour of performing congregational prayer behind him. And so it was until his death. I had always grieved not being able to pray behind him, until last year when he came to Mashhad in the month of Sha'ban (May 1981) and stayed in our place. We made the library his room so that he could have access to any book that he wanted. On the first day, when it was time for sunset prayer, I laid down one prayer rug for him and one for his accompanying nurse and assistant. I knew that if I stayed in the room, he would not lead the prayer. Therefore I exited the room so that he would start his prayer, and then I could enter the room and join the already-established congregation.

About a quarter of an hour had passed after sunset when I heard his assistant calling me. When I went there, he told me, 'He ['Allamah] is waiting for you to lead the prayer.'

I told 'Allamah, 'I will pray behind you!' 'I would pray behind you,' he replied.

'I beg you,' I said, 'just perform your own prayer!' 'And we beg the same!'

'I have asked you for forty years to let me perform one prayer behind you,' I implored, 'and it has not occurred yet. Please accept!'

He smiled gracefully. 'Well, add one more year to those forty years.'

I frankly could not see myself standing in front and letting him follow me. I felt awfully shy and embarrassed. He was determined, and there was no way he would let go of his position. And it was not appropriate for me to decline his call and pray separately in another room. So I said, 'I am your servant and obedient to you; I will follow your order.' He said, 'There is no order. This is my plea!'

Thus I got up and performed the sunset prayer, and he followed. So in addition to failing to do a single prayer behind him in forty years, I fell into such a trap. God knows, his expression of shyness, embarrassment, and request that was evident in his countenance would have humiliated the gentle wind, and would have melted the hard rock.

The grace of your manners exceeds the gentle wind;
Yet by your power, the rocks are crushed and thinned.

Your spirit is so high, that a poem cannot define;
And your traits are so many, that no one can confine.[56]

‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s approach to mysticism (Sufism)

Our teacher and master’s mystical (*‘irfani*)[57] approach was that of his unequalled master, Sayyid ‘Ali Qadi, who himself followed his master, Sayyid Ahmad Karbala’i Tihrani, who in turn had adopted the approach of his master, Akhund Mulla Husayn-Quli Darjazini Hamadani (may Allah be pleased with them all). Their approach was the method of gnosis of the soul (*ma’rifat al-nafs*), which, based on numerous narrations, is accompanied by the gnosis of the Lord (*ma’rifat al-rabb*).[58] One achieves the gnosis of the Lord after leaving behind the imaginal world (*‘alam al-mithal*) – that is, the realm of forms (*surah*) – and even going beyond the realm of the soul (*nafs*). It is upon total detachment from the soul (*nafs*) that one achieves everlasting subsistence by the Lord (*baqa’ bi al-Rabb*). The Sultan of Gnosis [i.e. the unveiling of God’s unity] will manifest only when there are no remaining signs of the wayfarer’s *nafs*.

Amongst the chief requirements of achieving this state is watchfulness and self-vigilance (*muraqabah*). For each and every station (*manzil*) of the journey, one must observe the manners and requirements of that station and the situation at which he is. Otherwise, worshipping and performing the required deeds without self-vigilance (*muraqabah*) is like a patient’s taking medication without abstaining from harmful foods; it will not have the desired result. The fundamentals of self-vigilance – the details of which vary based on the different stages of the journey – can be summarised in five points:

The perfection of the imperfect lies in five:
Eat and sleep only to survive,
Solitude from the people, and talk very little,
And constant attention (*dhikr*), in order to thrive.
(Shah Qasim Anwar, d. 837/1434)[59]

Our late teacher had a very high regard for two religious scholars whom he remembered with great reverence. One was Sayyid ‘Ali ibn Tawus (may Allah elevate his rank). ‘Allamah cherished his book *Iqbal al-A’mal* and used to call him the Master of the Watchful (*sayyid ahl al-muraqabah*). The other was Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-’Ulum (may Allah elevate his rank). ‘Allamah admired his lifestyle, self-vigilance, and his approach to knowledge and practice. He used to frequently talk about both men’s meetings with Imam Mahdi (may our spirits be sacrificed for him). ‘Allamah was amazed at their purity from the desires of the base soul and their diligence on the path to their cherished destination. He respected their lifestyles and admired their determination in seeking God’s pleasure, Exalted is He.

He had a high regard for the treatise on spiritual journey and wayfaring (*sayr wa suluk*) attributed to Sayyid Bahr al-‘Ulum, and recommended its reading. He had himself taught several series of the treatise with fairly thorough and extensive explanations for some intimate students who were passionate devotees of the Truth and aspirants of the vision of Allah.

Among the concise books on ethics, ‘Allamah’s favourite was Ibn Miskawayh’s *Taharat al-A’raq*. Among

the medium-sized ones, he considered *Jami' al-Sa'adat* of Mulla Mahdi Naraqi the best, and his favourite extensive book on ethics was *Ihya' al-Ihya'* (*al-Mahajjat al-Bayda'*) of Mulla Muhsin (Muhammad ibn Murtada) Fayd al-Kashani. He maintained that the claim in *Rawdat al-Jannat* – that Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* heavily draws from Ibn Miskawayh's *Taharat al-A'raq*, which in turn was obtained from Indian sages – is not true.[60] Ibn Miskawayh was a contemporary of Ibn Sina and his book on philosophy is totally based on Greek philosophy, with no elements of Indian philosophy. Likewise, his book in ethics, *Taharat al-A'raq*, does not match the style of the Indians.

As with Naraqi,[61] he was a first-class jurist, mystic, and philosopher. He was matchless in mathematics and astronomy, and his profundity of thought was exceptional. He was also an authority in ethics. It is quite shocking that this man has not yet been recognised. It is only recently that some of his books have been published, and the rest of his excellent works are going to be published soon.

And the ranks and merits of Fayd al-Kashani are brighter than the sun and need no mention. His *al-Mahajjat al-Bayda'*, which is a revival of (Ghazzali's) *Ihya' al-'Ulum*, is among the most precious Shi'a books. May Allah be pleased with them all.

'Allamah's conduct and his attainment of divine realities

The clear difference between 'Allamah Tabataba'i and others was that his conduct originated from within and was based on inward perceptions. He had objectified the spiritual realities within himself. He had differentiated the realm of reality and actuality (*haqiqah* and *waqi'iyyah*) from the realm of nominality and facade (*majaz* and *i'tibar*) and had reached the realities of the Divine Spheres (*malakut*). In fact, his behaviour was the manifestation of his spiritual standing in the corporeal world. The spiritual realities that he had achieved were the foundation on which he built all his affairs, interactions, and dealings.

But the ethical approach of others was to seek an inward opening and path to the proximity (*qurb*) of the Majestic One through outward purification, observing the instructions of the shariah and vigilance over bodily limbs. May Allah bless those of them who have passed away.

'Allamah Tabataba'i's poetic talent

'Allamah had a gentle spirit, a remarkable talent, and a special elegance.[62] Among Arabic poems, he was interested in the poems of Ibn al-Farid, especially his *Nazm al-Suluk* (*The Rhyme of Wayfaring*), also known as *al-Ta'iyyah al-Kubra*. And among Persian poems, he adored the *Divan* of Hafiz. He sometimes used to softly recite mystical Persian and Arabic poems for his ode-loving friends. He frequently recited the following verses when talking about how a wayfarer must focus all his thoughts and attention on Allah, not seek excessiveness, ascendancy, or predominance in any way, but rather aim at his Lord while taking the humility of servitude as the provision for his journey and God's love as his guide. He frequently drew upon the following verses, and used to say that the poet had done a superb job in showing the path to non-being and annihilation (*fana'*):

A blazing love whispered in my soul
The stories of passions that burn like coal,
From a people far away, alone and sole;
It was the gentle wind, narrating from the breeze,
From mountains in Najd,63 from the giant trees;

It's the word of my tears, and my wretched eye,
The message of my zeal, and the sorrow in my sigh,
And the passion of my heart, bleeding with a cry:

That my yearning and my love have taken an oath
To seek my death and failure of growth

Until my tomb becomes my room
That was their pledge: to seek my doom.
(Abu Muhammad Hamd ibn Hamid al-Dinawari, d. 632/1235)

'Allamah Tabataba'i's epics and odes

'Allamah had a remarkable sense for poetry. His rich mystical odes inspire passion and zeal, and are full of love and yearning [for Allah]. We present one of them as a sample:

The love of the dears takes away
One's heart and faith, and anything that you say;
The rook (*rukh*) of chess cannot ever win
What the lovely face (*rukh*) takes away.

Majnun went insane, but not on his own;
It was Layla's pull throughout the way.64
I reached the sun, not on my own;
I was an iota; Your love made me sway.

I'm a nameless mote that fell in the flood;
It took me as it flowed to the heart of the bay.
The glass of wine was held by whom?
The zealous hearts, it stole away.

For a glance on Your brow, and Your heavenly hand,
My name and fame, I had to pay.
You taught me love, and You fired me up,
Your glowing face, blew my peace away.

The arc of Your brow, only plundered me;
A whole group of us were walking Your way.
The sorrow of Your love, only fell on me,
But for its befalling, we all used to pray.[65]

‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s modesty toward the Infallibles

Our honourable teacher had a particular affection and zeal toward the Infallible Imams. When the name of one of them was uttered, modesty and reverence would become evident in his face. He had a special admiration for Imam Mahdi (may our spirits be sacrificed for him). He considered the station and rank of the Infallible Imams, the Honourable Messenger of Allah and Hadrat Fatimah to be beyond comprehension. He had a deep and genuine humbleness and humility toward them, believed in their divine (*malakuti*) ranks, and was fully acquainted with their biographies and history.

In many cases, when he was asked about one of them, he would give such an explanation that was as if he had studied their life history just today, or as if the answer was being revealed to him from above.

It was his old custom to visit the precinct of the Eighth Imam every summer. He used to stay there all summer, not going anywhere else unless necessary. There, in the sanctified land of Mashhad, he used to visit the Holy Shrine every night, in a mood of supplication and humility. People often suggested that he should stay somewhere outside Mashhad with a better climate, like Turqabah, where he could occasionally go to Mashhad to visit the Imam. But he would always decline and say, ‘We do not leave the Eighth Imam’s precinct for anywhere else.’[66]

He was also extremely humble and subservient toward the Noble Qur’an. He usually recited the verses of Qur’an from memory, and knew the position of most of the verses.

He was also quite sharp in recalling the other verses relevant to any given verse. His Qur’anic discussions were truly interesting and informative.

‘Allamah’s patience in difficulties

Since childhood, the sole source of financial support for ‘Allamah and his brother was their inherited farmland in the Shad-Abad village of Tabriz. ‘Allamah was from a respected and famous family in Azerbaijan, as his pedigree shows. He wrote his hand-written treatises (*al-Tawhid*, *al- Insan*, *al-Wasa’it*, and *al-Wilayah*) in Shad-Abad village when he was farming to make a living.

About their farmland, he said, ‘This property has been the legal property of our ancestors for two hundred and seventy years. Our only means of income is through farming.’ If the land were confiscated, his means of livelihood would have been totally disturbed, causing him a lot of hardship.

He did not have other financial backing because he had intentionally chosen his path as such. Despite

his status as a jurist and qualification to become a *marja'* (source of emulation in law), he engaged in academic endeavours, defending Islam and Shi'ism, and training students in spirituality, ethics and true beliefs. Thus he had no time or energy for writing a book of legal rulings or serve as a source of jurisprudence.

Even though he had no income from these activities, he also refused to accept the Imam's Share (*sahm al-Imam*).[67] Therefore any delays or losses in his farming income would have resulted in a living that was even lower than that of an ordinary student. For if a student does not receive financial support from home, he can at least make use of the Imam's Share. Even when 'Allamah received an income from the farm, it was only sufficient to cover his necessary expenses. Generally, our men of knowledge and scholarship have struggled with these difficulties throughout history.

Our men of knowledge have always endured insufficient livelihoods

The late Ayatollah Jawad Balaghi Najafi was a pride of Islam, and his books illuminated the world of knowledge. He used to live in a simple house carpeted with hessian. He was forced to sell the house in which he lived in order to be able to publish his books, which were truly sources of honour and esteem for Islam against the materialists, the seculars, the Jews and the Christians.

Our teacher's master, the late Ayatollah Qadi (may Allah be pleased with upon him) had a large household to look after. He had such limited livelihood that his stories serve as exemplars and proverbs for us. There was no furniture in his house but a hessian of palm. Many times he and his family passed the night in darkness due to lack of kerosene and oil for the lamp.

Likewise, the late Ayatollah 'Allamah Aqa Buzurg Tihrani had no source of income, and no one was aware of his financial condition. He served Islam, Shi'ism and knowledge for a hundred years; carried out indispensable efforts; and left behind unique and priceless works. Today, his works are used as references by authors and the people of research and scholarship. Day and night he was busy writing, making efforts, and collecting written documents and records. The condition of his house was just like that of an ordinary student, if not lower and simpler. The difficulties he endured are beyond imagination.

'Allamah Amini, the author of *al-Ghadir* (11 volumes), had an insufficient livelihood before his recognition and fame. In fact, he had a hard time even publishing the first edition of *al-Ghadir.*

The issue of allocation and organisation of religious funds is a serious problem in the religious administration system today. There are abundant funds on hand in the field of Islamic law (*fiqh*), but those who spend a lifetime in certain disciplines like philosophy, mysticism, theology, commentary, tradition, history, the science of narrators (*rijal*) and other fields lack even a simple and ordinary living. Why should they face thousands of problems and troubles in order to cover their living expenses while preserving their honour and dignity?

They dedicate themselves to these fields in order to benefit Islam, to provide for society's need for these sciences, to cover points of weakness, and to defend and guard the Shi'a school of thought. Why should these scholars be neglected in the allocation and distribution of the budget sent as the Imam's Share to the *hawzahs*? And why should their acceptance of Imam's Share – through the agents and administrators of these funds – involve humiliation and degradation for them?

Why should the juristic expertise of these honourable people, who possess ethical and spiritual virtues at the same time as being educated scholars (in *fiqh*), not be recognised? Why should they not be given permission of *ijtihad* (independent juristic judgment), just because it entails the recognition and approval of their character and their independence (from the strictly juristic circles and the *hawzahs*)?

And instead, why should unlearned, negligent, and insolent individuals be given lengthy and extensive authorisations – with exaggerated titles and formalities – to collect the Imam's Share and other dues? In ethical and spiritual qualities, these ineligible individuals are even inferior to ordinary people. All this is done [by those in charge of the financial resources] in order to preserve their power and centrality. And they do this on account of claiming to be superior in knowledge (*a'lam*), jurisprudence (*afqah*), and piety (*awra'*). So much regret for this approach, which is most flawed, devastating, and fatal to knowledge and its people, and to jurisprudence and its people.

And if they are asked, 'Why, and based on what evidence from the Qur'an or *hadith* do you claim that the Imam's Share that one pays should necessarily be collected by one's *marja'* (Source of Emulation) or his representative? From which book of law, tradition, or exegesis have you inferred such a ruling? What are these innovations and customs that you introduce?' they would respond, 'It is so-and-so's ruling.' But you claim to have reached the rank of *ijtihad*! So why when it comes to this subject, all of a sudden you become blind followers?

At any rate, 'Allamah had a very simple and unembellished lifestyle. He had the minimum requirements for living. In spite of his heart problem, nervous disorder and old age, he used to come to Tehran every second week for his meetings with Henry Corbin. He bore all that hardship only to defend the religion and spread Islamic culture. Such was the condition of an Eastern philosopher, who was truly one of a kind. And I did not go into detail about his personal living conditions since it would be against his honour and dignity. Such is the life of Allah's friends:

They endured [hardship] for a few days, which resulted in lasting comfort.[68]

Every single quality of the self-restrained men (*muttaqin*) explained by the Commander of the Faithful in this sermon was manifest in this godly man:

The transient world desired them, but they desired it not. It took them captive but they ransomed and liberated themselves from it.[69]

Such is the life of people of felicity, those who are free from captivity of the evil commanding soul; those

who soar in the realm of God's Will and Decree, and those who have settled in the realms of entrustment (*tafwid*), submission (*taslim*) and satisfaction (*rida*). Their condition is expressed in this poem of Hafiz – which our teacher was quite fond of:

I am the infamous lover in this zone;
Evil is a seed that my eyes have never sown.
By wine-worshipping I ruined my self,
So that self-worshipping may ever be blown.
We hold on, take the blame, yet we're happy;
In the faith that we hold, there is no grief or moan.
I asked the bar's master of the key to success;
He called for a glass. 'Keep the secrets unknown.'

Yet, despite all the difficulties, disapproval, and accusation that he faced, he was a world of splendour, serenity, and peace. In these people we can well observe the lifestyle of the Infallible Imams. Tabataba'i and those like him truly represent those pure spirits.

The reason for 'Allamah Tabataba'i's immigration to Qum from Tabriz

Likewise, 'Allamah migrated to Qum, bore many difficulties, and tolerated detachment from his dear homeland for the very cause of Islam. He went through all that for spiritual objectives: to fulfil the divine mission of spreading and promoting the religion, for the students' intellectual development, and to revive genuine beliefs. He wanted to guide the students to the straight path of polishing the soul, refining conduct, achieving the vision of Allah, and connecting to the spiritual realm.

Ayatollah Burujirdi's message to 'Allamah and 'Allamah's reply

Our late teacher narrated:

"When I came to Qum from Tabriz, I started [teaching] a course on *Asfar*. It became popular in no time, and about a hundred students used to attend the lectures. But then Ayatollah Burujirdi (may Allah's mercy be upon him) ordered the cessation of stipends to those students who attend the *Asfar* course.

When I was informed of that, I wondered, 'Oh my God! What should I do? If the stipend of the students is cut, what will happen to these indigent individuals from distant cities whose only means of livelihood is the stipend? And if I stop teaching *Asfar* because of this, it would harm the students' academic level and their beliefs!'

I was uncertain for a while, until one day, while feeling confused, I spotted the *Divan* of Hafiz on our *kursi* (a traditional table-heater) in the room. I picked it up and carried out a divination with the intention, 'What

to do? Should I stop teaching *Asfar* or not?' This ode appeared:[70]

The liberated soul that I am will never forsake
The darling that I have, or the drink that I intake;
The sheriff has lost hope in me doing this mistake.
I've censured the repenters all the time;
If I repent myself, it's a crazy crime;
At the time of spring, drinking is the prime.
The tulip is drinking, and the narcissus is in glee,
That is something that no one can see;
But I'm judged by all, as a sinner and debauchee,
So many referees, but which one is for me?

I have treasures of rubies and garnets of tear,
So why should I look at the sun and its glare?
In my beggary I own every treasure;
I have no desire for this world and its pleasure.
Though I am poor, it would be a shame
If the pure spring of the sun is my aim.
If the beloved wants the lovers in fire;
May I be killed, if the heaven I desire.
The ruby of her lips was red and bright,
Appealing to Hafiz in the silent night;
But I never fall for her myths and her plight.

I was amused by this ode. Its message was that it is necessary to teach *Afsar*, and renouncing it is like a wayfarer's infidelity (against his principles and duties on his path toward Allah).

On the same day or the following day, Ayatollah Burujirdi sent his servant, Hajj Ahmad, to our house, with the message, 'While I was a youth in the *hawzah* of Isfahan, we used to study *Asfar* with the late Jahangir Khan. But we were a small group, and used to go to his lessons in secret. However, teaching *Asfar* openly in the *hawzah* is in no way appropriate, and must be abandoned!'

I replied, 'Convey this message of mine to Mr Burujirdi, that I too have studied these common conventional courses like Islamic law and principles of law. I can go about teaching and lecturing them, and am not short of anyone else in these fields. However, I came from Tabriz to Qum only (and only) to correct the beliefs of the students, and to fight against the false beliefs of the materialists and others. During the period when you, our Honourable Ayatollah [Burujirdi], used to go to the late Jahangir Khan's lessons in secret, the students and most of the people were believers and had a pure faith; all praise is to Allah [for that]. There was no need for establishing open *Asfar* classes at that time. However, these days the students enter the gates of Qum with several bags full of doubts and problems!

‘Today we should rescue the students, properly prepare them to combat materialists and secularists, and teach them true Islamic philosophy. Thus I will not stop teaching *Asfar*. But at the same time I consider the Ayatollah [Burujirdi] as the Religious Ruler (*hakim al- shar’*). If you make an edict for the *Asfar* classes to be stopped, then that will be a different story [and I will abide by it].’

After that message, Ayatollah Burujirdi did not interfere any further, and we continued teaching philosophy for several years, based on *Shifa’*, *Asfar*, and other books. In fact, Ayatollah Burujirdi used to greatly honour and respect me whenever we met. And one day he sent me a volume of the Noble Qur’an as a gift, which was of the finest prints.”

At any rate, what can I say of the virtues of a man who was truly singular in this world? He appeared in obscurity, and departed in obscurity. No one recognised him, as his profound character was out of reach.

‘Allamah was a guard and refuge for the students

‘Allamah Tabataba’i was a guard and refuge for his sincere pupils and friends, who used to resort to him in calamities. He was like a bright lamp that illuminates the path, identifies dangers, and separates truth and falsehood. He was a guide and an aide in solving scientific[71] problems and removing obscurities.

I, this nondescript being, have always felt myself in need of his instruction and his beneficial presence. Wherever he was, he emanated such mercy, knowledge, wisdom, good mood, enthusiasm, and *tawhid* that I felt ashamed of my utter inferiority. I typically used to go to Qum every other week, and the times when I met with him were most dear to me.

Every single time that I met him, I used to bend to kiss his hand. However, he would cover his hand with his cloak with an incredible mood of humility and shyness that impressed me.

One day I told him, ‘We [want to] kiss your hand for its blessing, grace, and [as a sign of our] need. So why do you prevent us?’ Then I added, ‘Sir, do you believe in the narration reported from Imam ‘Ali, that whoever teaches me one letter has thus made me his slave?’[72]

‘Yes, it is a well-known narration, and compliant with the principles and teachings [of Islam],’ he replied.

I said, ‘You have taught us all these lessons, and have thus made us your slave over and over again! Is it not of a slave’s manners to kiss his master’s hand, and thereby seek blessings?’

He smiled delicately. ‘We are all slaves of God!’[73]

What we did not conceive of was the departure of this man. The death of this godly man was the death of the world, because ‘Allamah was the world. However, he is alive; all living people are dead, but he is alive. ‘People are dead, but the men of knowledge are alive.’[74]

Intellect, conscience, and religion

There are two centres of comprehension and conception in every human being: one is called the intellect (*'aql*), and the other is called the heart and conscience (*qalb* and *wijdan*).

With the power of intellect, one comprehends what is good for him and what is bad, and distinguishes between the desirable and the undesirable, and between truth and falsehood. Through the heart and conscience – which may also be called nature (*fitrah*), temperament, inner impression, or hidden intuition – one connects with the world, realises why the universe and himself were created, and is attracted toward the Origin of all origins and the End of all ends.

Both of these crucial means of comprehension exist in a person. Each of them pursues its mission along its own horizon of conception and understanding, and neither of them can substitute for the other. Should one of them be lost, the person loses access to a world of knowledge and thoughts.

The Qur'an and Hadith on the necessity to follow the intellect

There are many Qur'anic verses and numerous narrations concerning one's indispensable need to follow the intellect. We only present a few for illustration. As with the verses of the Noble Qur'an:

Fie upon you and all that you worship instead of Allah; do you not ponder? (***21:67***)

Here, it is presumed that the idolaters were following their nature and conscience in worshiping the idols, and in doing so they considered themselves connected to God. However, because of not pondering, they erred in identifying their object of worship. Thus, going against the rule of the intellect, they found God manifested in their idols.

...[***They are***] ***deaf, mute and blind; thus they understand not.*** (***2:171***)

Here, since they do not utilise their power of intellect, it is as if they have neither vision nor hearing, and are also speechless.

...[***O, Our Messenger,***] ***Canst thou make the deaf hear, though they understand not?*** (***10:42***)

... ***So give good tidings to my servants; who listen to the speech and follow the best thereof; such are those whom Allah hath guided, and such are those possessed of minds.*** (***39:17–18***)

It is clear that listening to speech and then distinguishing between truth and falsehood, and between good and better is a duty of the mind. Therefore, at the end of the verse, they are referred to as possessors of minds, that is, intellect.

And the likeness of those who disbelieve is the likeness of one who shouteth to that which hears naught but a call and a cry. [***They are***] ***deaf, mute and blind; thus they understand not.*** (***2:171***)

The infidels selected and followed a religion based on their instinct and inner drive, and that was to worship the idols. However, as they did not make use of their intellect, they continually ended up employing their instincts and inner sensations on pointless illusions and groundless fantasies. Therefore they did not benefit from their conscience and disposition. Just like one who does not realise anything from a speech except its noise and sound, they too only heard some ideas, but did not understand any truth, and it did not settle in their souls. So in effect, they were a group of deaf, mute and blind people who had absolutely no comprehension.

And as with the narrations: it is reported from Imam Sadiq that the Messenger of Allah said:
If you see a man performing a lot of prayer and fasting, do not esteem him until you examine his intellect.[75]

Imam Sadiq is also reported to have said:
The pillar of mankind is the intellect. . . [76]
The intellect is the guide of a believer.[77]

The Qur'an and hadith on the necessity to follow the heart and conscience

There are also verses and narrations regarding the need to follow the heart and conscience. As with the verses:

Have they not journeyed in the land so that there would be hearts for them by which they understand or ears by which they hear? For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts within the chests that grow blind. (***22:46***)

This addresses those who have intellect and wits, but who have strangled their hearts by following the desires of the evil commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammarah*), have covered their consciences under the veils of sins and wrongdoings, and have blinded their spirits.

[***O, Our Messenger***] ***Surely thou canst not make the dead hear, nor canst thou make the deaf hear the call whilst they turn their backs and retreat.*** (***27:80***)

Here, Allah likens those who have destroyed their inner light and power of intuition to the dead. In fact He really regards them as dead and deaf. The word of truth and the right speech does not have any impact in their ears whatsoever, and they constantly flee from it.

... Certainly Allah maketh whomever He will to hear, and thou canst not make those in the graves hear. (***35:22***)

Is one who knoweth what hath been revealed unto thee from thy Lord is the truth like one who is blind?. . . (***13:19***)

In these verses, Allah considers those who have extinguished their inner light and closed the path to the Hereafter on themselves as dead, blind, or living in the graves.

These verses are about suppressing the light of the heart, not about disobeying the power of intellect and thought. And there are numerous narrations on this topic. For instance, regarding the verse:

The nature of Allah upon which He created mankind… (***30:30***)

…it is reported that Imam Sadiq interpreted nature (*fitrah*) as the belief in unity (*tawhid*): 'He created them on *tawhid*.'[78]

In another narration, Jamil ibn Darraj asked Imam Sadiq about the meaning of 'composure' (*sakinah*) in the verse, ***'It is He Who sent down composure into the hearts of the believers…'*** (***48:4***). The Imam replied, 'It means faith (*iman*).' Then Jamil inquired about the meaning of spirit (*ruh*) in the verse, ***'And He strengthened them by a spirit from Him . . .'*** (***58:22***). The Imam answered, 'It means faith.' Then he asked about self-restraint (*taqwa*) in the verse, ***'And He imposed on them the word of self-restraint…'*** (***48:26***). The Imam said, 'It means faith.'[79]

And there are two terms in the Qur'an: ***hanifan musliman*** (an upright submitter, 3:67), which Imam Sadiq interpreted as 'Pure and sincere, without any worshipping of the idols.'[80]

It is evident from these narrations that the inner light consists of having faith in Allah, having a monotheistic nature, and having a heart that is pure from base desires, cravings, and the dark stains of the material world. This light is the heart's means of conception and what attracts the conscience to the realms of angels (*malakut*), immaterial intellects (*jabarut*), and divine names (*lahut*).[81]

Intellect, heart, and religion characterise the same reality

Based on the above, it becomes clear that human beings have two essential centres of comprehension: one for intellectual contemplation, and one for the emotions and vision of the heart and conscience.

Spiritual vision begets faith, and connects [the knowledge of] one's self with [the knowledge of] the Exalted Creator. Without it, even thousandfold intellectual, philosophical, and mental contemplation cannot make one humble and subservient. Even a series of valid arguments based on reason and lucid deduction cannot eliminate the instability of one's spirit. They cannot bring about serenity, peace, or confidence.

Meanwhile, intellectual contemplation stabilises and balances inner emotions. It prevents acting based on imagination and futile delusions, and keeps the intuitive vision on the right track. Without intellectual contemplation, the inner vision strays from the straight path, embraces illusions and imaginations, and will be easily pulled toward anything that slightly appeals to the heart.

And here is where the controversy between the intellect (*'aql*) and love (*'ishq*) and each one's merit over the other will be settled, for this dispute has no basis to begin with. Love and intellect have two distinct and separate roles, and each of them follows its own specific track. They are in two distinct centres of conception. Both are necessary, and it is wrong to employ one and discard the other.

Moreover, religion (*shar'*) supports both of them, and strengthens them if they become weak. That is, the intellect, the heart, and the religion describe one truth and reality; they are three representations of the same idea.

Therefore, it is impossible for the ruling of religion to oppose that of the intellect or the innate nature (*fitrah*). Likewise, it is impossible for the ruling of intellect to contradict that of the innate nature or religion, or the ruling of innate nature to disagree with that of the intellect or religion. These three are connected together like a chain, and maintain and support one another.

He hath laid down for you a religion which He enjoined Noah, and that which We have revealed to thee, and what We enjoined Abraham and Moses and Jesus: to establish the religion and divide not therein.... (***42:13***)

And We truly sent down the book upon thee; that confirms the previous books and encompasses them. So judge between them by what Allah hath sent, and follow not their desires instead of the truth that hath come to thee. For every [***group***] ***of you We have appointed a straight way*** [***i.e. religion***] ***and a clear path....*** (***5:48***)

Then We set thee on a clear road [***i.e. religion***] ***of Our command; so follow it, and follow not the desires of those who know not.*** (***45:18***)

It is reported from Hisham ibn Hakam that Imam Musa ibn Ja'far told him:

O Hisham! Indeed Allah has two proofs and arguments against the people: an outer proof and an inner proof. The outer one is the messengers, prophets, and leaders – peace be upon them – and the inner one is the intellects.[82]

In another narration, Imam 'Ali said,

If I truly realise that a person has [even] one good quality amongst all virtues, I consider him on that and overlook the absence of the rest. Except that I do not overlook the absence of reason or religion. For the lack of the religion is the lack of security, and clearly a life with fear is not pleasant. And the lack of reason is the lack of life, and such a person is only comparable with the dead.[83]

The necessity to follow the intellect, spirit and religion in the

Qur'an, narrations and supplications

So the verses of the Noble Qur'an and the traditions of the Infallibles insist on one's need to follow the religion and strengthen the intellect and the heart. Likewise, in the supplications reported from the Infallibles, the Majestic Lord is asked for the enhancement of all three.

Among the supplications reported in *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Imam 'Ali expresses gratitude to Allah for having an upright intellect, a firm religion, and an established faith in the heart:

All praise be to Allah, Who did not bring me on this day dead or ill, or with my veins being infected with disease, or being taken for my worst deeds, or my progeny being cut off, or retreating from my religion, or disbelieving in my Lord, or bewildered from my faith, or my intellect being disturbed, or being punished by the punishments of the previous nations.[84]

'Allamah Tabataba'i was a master of intellect, heart, and religion

Our teacher, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, had achieved perfection in all three fields: the intellect, the heart and religion. In fact he was the highest among his contemporaries. In terms of intellectual aptitude and theoretical wisdom (*al-hikmat al-nazariyyah*), he was a matchless figure in the Islamic world, as already mentioned, and his opponents and supporters both agree on this.

In terms of action, practical wisdom (*al-hikmat al-'amaliyyah*), the spiritual journey toward the high stages of divine hidden realms, and reaching the ranks of the intimates (*muqarrabin*) and the truthful (*siddiqin*), his silent closed lips prevent us from revealing his states and achievements even after his death. After all, he considered concealment of secrets amongst the greatest duties of a wayfarer. We can only say in brief, as already mentioned, that 'Allamah was absent from this transient world, from his arrival to his departure.

And peace be upon him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive. (***19:15***)

Concerning religion and the shariah, he was a full-fledged jurist, who carefully observed literally every custom and ritual. He would not neglect even the slightest optional practice, and he regarded the couriers of the sacred religion (i.e. the Infallibles) with an eye of reverence, exaltation and honour.

In addition, he was critical of certain Sufis who do not attach sufficient importance to the sacred shariah. He considered their approach prone to error, and one that would not lead to the desired destination. He admired and emphasised the following passage from the *Risalah* attributed to 'Allamah Bahr al-'Ulum:

A general master (*ustad-i 'amm*) may not be identified except through intimate association with him in public and private and verifying the completeness of the faith of his limbs and soul. One should be warned not to be deceived into following someone because of seeing him perform marvels, disclosing

subtle matters, transforming certain states of his self, or revealing cosmic mysteries and personal secrets. One can read minds, discover subtle secrets, walk on fire and water, teleport through the air and land, foretell the future and do other similar acts at the stage of Spiritual Unveiling (*al-mukashafah al-ruhiyyah*). But there is an infinitely long way from this stage to the final destination. There are yet numerous stations and stages. So many travellers have passed this stage but strayed later on, and became thieves and devils. And this is how even some disbelievers have been able to do certain actions.[85]

He used to explain and expound on this section for his pupils, and mention that without observing the sacred shariah, one cannot achieve reality.

'Allamah, was particularly very humble and meek toward the Noble Qur'an. He more or less knew the Qur'anic verses by heart. He had developed a warm and amiable bond with the verses due to his constant involvement and affiliation with the Book. To him, reciting the Qur'an 'through parts of the night and round the day' (*ana' al-layl wa atraf al-nahar*) was the best and most treasured deed. By recalling and going over one verse, he was drawn into another verse and then another, and thus he was immersed in a world of delight and pleasure, enjoying the beauties of the Qur'an.

Moreover, 'Allamah was critical of certain pretenders to sanctity who only adhere to the outward rituals. They were those who took religion as a pretext and, under the pretence of defending the sacred religion and spreading the shariah, severely condemned all friends of Allah (*awliya'*) who were engaged in self-vigilance (*muraqabah*), self-reckoning (*muhasabah*), and may have perchance performed long prostrations. In the first place, these people tend to criticise and reproach certain great men of mysticism (*'irfan*) such as Khwajah Hafiz Shirazi and Mawlana Muhammad Balkhi Rumi, the composer of the Mathnawi. 'Allamah attributed this way of thinking to ignorance, tedium and dullness, which are so detested by the spirit of religion.

'Two parties break my back: an impudent scholar and an ignorant worshiper'

He maintained that badmouthing philosophy and mysticism, which are two of the major pillars of the sacred religion, is due to one's inflexibility of thought and lassitude of mind. He used to say, 'One should seek refuge in Allah from these ignorant and intolerant individuals. They were those who broke the back of the Messenger of Allah,' as he said:

Two parties break my back: an impudent scholar and an ignorant worshiper.[86]

On the other hand, he also did not approve of those who were intellectually advanced and had studied philosophy and *hikmah*, but were weak in religious matters and observing the shariah. 'A wisdom that does not settle in the heart and does not result in following the religion is not wisdom,' he would argue.

Imam ‘Ali’s sermon in describing ‘men whom no purchase or sale distracteth from the remembrance of Allah’

Here, as we wrap up this precious treatise (the memorial section of the book), it is very apt to present a sermon of *Nahj al-Balaghah* that Imam ‘Ali delivered about the friends of Allah (*awliya’*), in explanation of the noble verse, ***‘Men whom no trade or sale distracteth from the remembrance of Allah…’*** (***24:37***). In this sermon, the Imam describes the specific traits and conditions of these people. Thus this memorial may be concluded by the blessing of this grand and exalted sermon by the Master of the Monotheists. All these signs and attributes were gathered in our teacher and master, ‘Allamah Tabataba’i (may Allah send mercy on his noble soul and pour his blessings upon us). It is as if Imam ‘Ali is describing ‘Allamah and other gnostics of God and the disciples of the school of monotheism (*tawhid*) and guardianship (*wilayah*):

‘In all the periods, and times when there were no prophets, there have been persons with whom Allah (precious are His bounties) has whispered through their minds and spoken through their intellects. Thus, they kindle the light of wakefulness in the ears, eyes and hearts of others; reminding them of the days of Allah, and warning them of His Status. They are like the guides in the deserts.

Whoever adopts the straight path, they praise his way and give him tidings of deliverance. And whoever deviates right or left, they condemn his way and warn him of failure. It is in this way that they are lamps in the darks and guides in uncertainties.

Indeed, invocation (*dhikr*) has its people who have adopted it in place of this world (*dunya*). Thus, engagement in no purchase or sale keeps them from invocation, with which they pass their days. They yell in the ears of the heedless with shouts of deterrence against Allah’s forbidden deeds. They command [them] to justice, and themselves act up to it; and forbid [them from] evil, and themselves abstain from it.

It is as though they have finished the journey of this world to the hereafter, and can observe what is there. As if they perceive the mysteries of the long stay of the inhabitants of *barzakh* [the intermediate world between this world and the Day of Resurrection]. As if the Resurrection has verified its promises for them. Therefore they have removed the curtain from these things for the people of the world; it is as if they [literally] see what the people see not, and hear what they hear not.

You can picture them in your mind in their exalted positions and distinguished sittings, when they have opened the records of their deeds. They are prepared to take account of themselves for every minor or major action that they were ordered but failed to do, or were prohibited but indulged therein. They feel the heavy load of their sins on their backs, which they cannot bear. They are weeping and sobbing in their throats, moaning while replying to one another; bewailing to their Lord out of regret and confession. [If you imagine them as such in your mind] you would then be observing the emblems of guidance, and

the lamps in the darks. The angels are surrounding them; composure descends upon them; and the gates of the heavens are opened for them. They are provided with honorific seats, in such a place where Allah looks upon them; He is pleased with their effort and exalts their position; and they breathe the breeze of His pardon as they call unto Him. They are captives of their need to His munificence, and humble slaves before His magnificence. Their longtime grief has injured their hearts, and their long weeping has injured their eyes.

They have a knocking hand for every door that may open to Allah. They request from Him Whose vastness has no limit, and with Whom the yearners are never let down. So [now] you take account of your own soul, because the other souls have others that take account of them.[87]

The states of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i toward the end of his noble life

The state of our teacher was very peculiar in the last few years of his life. He was always introspective, thoughtful, and concentrated. He was at a high state of self-vigilance (*muraqabah*) from which he seldom descended. In the last year of his life, a state of slumber and trance usually dominated him. When he woke up, he would immediately perform ablution, sit facing the *qiblah* (Mecca), and close his eyes.

‘Allamah visited the sanctified city of Mashhad on 3 Sha’ban 1401 (6 June 1981) and stayed there for twenty-two days. Then he passed the rest of the summer in Damavand, near Tehran, because of its suitable climate. During that stay, he was once hospitalised in Tehran, but the intensity of his illness was such that even hospital treatment was not effective. Thereafter he returned to the splendid city of Qum, where he was living. There he rested at his house and did not admit any visitors, other than some of his select students.

One of his students related, ‘One day I went to visit him while his condition was intense. I saw he had turned on the lights in every room. He was wearing his turban and cloak, and was strolling in the rooms with an indescribable glee and happiness, as if he was awaiting someone.’

The passing, funeral and burial of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i

One of the scholars in Qum said:

During the last days of ‘Allamah’s life, I used to drop by his house in the afternoons, so that firstly I could take care of anything needed at home, and secondly to walk him a bit in the yard. One day, I went to his house and greeted him and asked, ‘Sir, do you need anything?’

‘I have a need! I have a need! I have a need!’ he repeated several times.

I realised that apparently ‘Allamah meant something else, and was soaring in a different horizon. He followed me into the room, with his eyes closed. He did not open them at all, and was engaged in certain

invocations, which I could not make out. Right upon sunset, while his eyes were still shut, and without looking at the sky, ‘Allamah started reciting the *adhan* (the call to prayer), and then he started performing the sunset prayer. I picked up a napkin in the room and held it on my hand in front of him so that he could prostrate on it, but he did not. I thought maybe he did not prostrate because the napkin was in my hand and not on something stable. So I brought something tall for prostration [without kneeling, due to his illness] from the inner room, and placed a muhr (clay prayer stone) on it. Thus he prostrated on it and finished his prayer.

His condition worsened day by day, until he was hospitalised in Qum. When exiting the house, he told his honourable wife, ‘I will not return!’[88]

He was hospitalised for approximately one week, and was totally unconscious the last two days. Until the morning – three hours before noon – on Sunday, 18 Muharram 1402 (15 November 1981), when he moved on to the eternal abode, doffed the old bodily attire, and donned the dress of everlasting life.[89]

Since I, this humble being, was living in Mashhad, the sanctified city of Imam Rida, I was not present in Qum when my honourable teacher passed away. But during these past days since his death, I have been constantly thinking about him. I owe him so much that his right over me is that of life. My passion for ‘Allamah incited me to jot down the above. So hereby I offer *Shining Sun* (*Mihr-i Taban*) in memory of that luminous sun of knowledge and gnosis to the passionate aspirants of the vision of the High Lord. May it be that by studying it, they do not cease from aspiring, but carry on the path with effort, diligence, and determination, and achieve the gnosis of the One Essence by annihilation in His Greatest Name. And I dedicate the reward of this work – if it is to be accepted – to the luminous spirit of that source of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and self- restraint (*taqwa*).

All praise is to Allah and all gratitude is to Him. The first section of this work, which took twenty days to write, was finished on the fortieth night of our late teacher’s departure, which coincides with the night of departure of the Noble Messenger, 28 Safar 1402 (25 December 1981).

O Allah, raise the rank of our honourable teacher. Resurrect him with Muhammad and his Infallible Progeny. Pour benefits from him upon us, and do not entrust us to ourselves for a blink of an eye in this world or in the Hereafter. By Thy mercy, O most Merciful of all those who are merciful!

Written by the sinful hands of the destitute servant, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tihrani, may Allah pardon him and his parents.

1. When he first entered Qum, ‘Allamah Tabataba’i was known by his family name of Qadi. However, since his ancestors go back to Ibrahim al-Tabataba, he preferred to be known as Tabataba’i. Or perhaps he changed his name out of reverence for his teacher and master, Sayyid ‘Ali Qadi, so they would not share the same name.
2. Shaykh ‘Abbas al-Qummi, al-Kuna wa al-Alqab (Najaf, 1956), 3:168.
3. My noble friend, Sayyid Muhammad ‘Ali Milani (the son of Ayatollah Milani), once narrated: ‘One day, I, my father, and my uncles, got a carriage from Tabriz for ‘Allamah’s village [Shad-Abad]. Before that, my uncles were talking to my father about the qiblah (direction of Mecca), as these compasses for finding the qiblah were not around yet. As we were riding the

carriage, my uncles asked my father 'Who is even this person for whom you are taking a carriage [all the way] from Tabriz to his village?' My father replied, 'He is the very person who is a unique master in solving these problems (of qiblah, the subject of the prior discussion).' I heard this a lot from my father that ''Allamah Tabataba'i knows some sciences that we do not,' by which he meant hidden and esoteric sciences.'

4. [Translator's note. The author deemed the correct and original writing of Tihran as ihran (with a' as opposed to ta') and accordingly he used to write his own last name as Husayni ihrani. Likewise, he used the same spelling for others, such as Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i ihrani and Aqa Buzurg ihrani. See S.M.H. Husayni Tihrani, Nur-i Malakut-i Qur'an (2nd ed., Mashhad, 1421/2000), 4:143.]

5. [Translator's note. Throughout the book, as in all traditional Muslim writings, references to the Prophet Muhammad are followed by 'peace be upon him and his family.' Likewise the names of the Imams and the other prophets are followed by 'peace be upon him'. For the most part these phrases have been dropped in the translation.]

6. Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi ibn Murtada Bahr al-'Ulum, Risalah- yi Sayr wa Suluk, with an introduction and commentary by Ayatollah S.M.H. Husayni Tihrani (3rd ed., Mashhad, 1417/1995). Partly translated into English, published in al-Tawhid Islamic Journal (vol.14, no. 3 and 4), and available at .

7. [Translator's note. Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Gharawi Isfahani was known as Ayatollah Kumpani ('Company'), since his father was a trusted well-to-do merchant in Kazimayn, and that was quite unique back in late nineteenth century CE. On several occasions, the author has referred to Ayatollah Gharawi Isfahani by this title, Kumpani. However, it is said that Ayatollah Gharawi Isfahani resented being called this title. Thus it has been dropped in the translation, and he is only referred to as Gharawi Isfahani, as he ostensibly preferred, and Allah knows best.]

8. These reviews have been published as Tawhid-i 'Ilmi wa 'Ayni ('Tawhid of the Intellect and Vision') (Tehran: Hikmat, 1410/1989).

9. [Translator's note. This name is often written as Khwansari, though the correct spelling is Khunsari. See Dihkhuda, Lughatnamah (Tehran, 1993-4), under the two names.]

10. Barrasi-ha-yi Islami, 2 vols. (Qum: Bustan-i Kitab-i Qum, 2008).

11. [Translator's note. See Ayatollah S.M.H. Husayni Tihrani, Risalah-yi Lubb al-Lubab dar Sayr wa Suluk-i Ulu al-Albab (Tehran, 1988): 131. It has been translated by Mohammad H. Faghfoory as Kernel of the Kernel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003): 107. This book is the result of 'Allamah Tabataba'i's lectures on wayfaring and spiritual journeying, compiled, edited and expanded by Ayatollah Husayni Tihrani. It has also been translated into English by 'Ali Quli Qara'i as Kernels of Kernels and published in al-Tawhid Islamic Journal (vol.13, no.4 and vol.14 no.1 and 2), and is available at < https://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/vol13-no4/lubb-al-lubab-short-treatise-wayfaring-s-m-husayn-husayni > and .]

12. Tawhid-i 'Ilmi wa 'Ayni (Tehran, 1410/1989): 162-3

13. In his account of the late Qadi, 'Allamah Aqa Buzurg Tihrani has cited 13 Dhu al-Hijjah 1285 (27 March 1869) as Mr Qadi's date of birth, and 6 Rabi' al-Awwal 1366 (29 January 1947) as his date of passing. See Tabaqat A'lam al-Shi'ah (Nuqaba' al-Bashar) (Najaf, 1954-), no. 2080, 4:1565-6. [Translator's note. The eighty-one years is according to the lunar calendar, and a lunar year is eleven days shorter than a solar year.]

14. 'Allamah was born on 29 Dhu al-Qa'dah 1321 (15 February 1904) in Shadigan [i.e. Shad-Abad] village near Tabriz. His mother passed away upon the delivery of his brother, the late Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Ilahi Tabataba'i, when 'Allamah was five years old. Therefore the two brothers had a five year difference. [Translator's note. According to 'Allamah's autobiography, at the beginning of Barrasi- ha-yi Islami, he was born in 1319/1902.]

After completing elementary and basic schooling (in Azerbaijan), 'Allamah Ayatollah Tabataba'i went to the noble city of Najaf to continue his education. There, for ten years, he attended the lessons of Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Na'ini, Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Gharawi Isfahani, Ayatollah Sayyid Husayn Badkubah'i, and Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Isfahani. After achieving the status of ijtihad in year 1354 (1935), he returned to Tabriz and taught there for ten years, and in 1365 (1946) he immigrated to and settled in the splendid city of Qum.

15. [Translator's note. A mujtahid is one who has the competence to methodologically extract and interpret shariah rulings from the Qur'an and the Islamic Tradition, and can prove the validity of those extractions.]

16. [Translator's note. Ayatollah Sayyid 'Ali Qadi's father was Sayyid Husayn Qadi, as mentioned above. However his name has been reported as Sayyid Hasan by mistake in Risalah-yi Lubb al-Lubab: 72 and in Kernel of the Kernel: 57, 70.]

17. [Translator's note. Muraqabah is explained in detail in Risalah-yi Lubb al-Lubab: 112-3, 144-5 and in Kernel of the Kernel: 92, 228. In a nutshell, muraqabah means to have a close and constant watch on one's actions, see one's self in presence of Allah, and try to feel Allah's presence, as if one is seeing Him (by the heart).]
18. The late Shaykh Ansari had willed that Sayyid 'Ali Shushtari perform his funeral prayer, and so he did. After the Shaykh's death, the late Shushtari took over the Shaykh's lectures and resumed the lessons right from where the Shaykh had stopped. He had taught for six months when he passed away.
19. From the end of spring through the summer, the stores in Najaf used to close at noon due to the high temperature.
20. Ayatollah Sadr al-Din Ha'iri Shirazi told me: 'My brother-in-law told me that 'Allamah said that in childhood, his mind was not sharp at all, and he could not comprehend his instructor's teachings. 'Until finally,' 'Allamah said, 'I performed a prostration in the empty lands outside of town and pleaded with Allah to give me either death or comprehension.'
I wanted to confirm it with 'Allamah. So I was looking for a proper occasion to ask him, without insulting him or being disrespectful, as it involved the idea of lack of comprehension. After a while, 'Allamah and his son-in-law came to Shiraz. There I got to be alone with 'Allamah when his son-in-law was praying in another room. I set the grounds gently by saying, 'If I ask you a question, would you mind answering it?' He replied, 'What harm would it do? If I know it I will answer.' So I said, 'It is about you. So if you surely know that you will answer, then I will ask, otherwise I withhold my question.' He said, 'Please [go on]! If I know it, I will answer.' I said, 'It has been said that in childhood, you could not comprehend the lessons. Then you performed a prostration and [since then] Allah has favoured you with such a grace that you achieve the solution to the most difficult questions. Is that so?' The instant I said these words, 'Allamah blushed, to the extent that I somewhat regretted having asked that question. Then he said, 'When I was studying Suyuti in Tabriz [i.e. Suyuti's al-Bahjat al-Mardiyyah fi Sharh al-Alfiyyah], our teacher used to test us, but I could not pull off one of the tests. So he told me, "You have wasted both your and my time!" I was really disturbed by his remark, as it got into my soul and spirit. Finally I could not stay in the city anymore, so I went outside Tabriz and did something on the top of the hills, and then Allah graced me.' But he did not mention what he did. I asked, 'Was it that no problem remained unsolved for you after that, and every question was resolved no matter how difficult it was?' He said, 'So far it has been so.'
21. [Translator's note. 'Ashura' refers to the tenth day of the first month of the Islamic lunar Calendar, Muharram. It is the date when Imam Husayn was martyred in year 61 AH (Tuesday, 9 October 680).]
22. [Translator's note. The attribution of Tafsir al-Musaffa to him is not certain. See Tafsir al-Asfa (Qum, 1997), 1:13.]
23. [Translator's note. See Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah (Beirut: Dar Ihya al- Turath al-al-'Arabi, 1981), vol. 3, part 2 (vol. 7 of 9): 244ff. for imkan al-ashraf; vol. 1, part 3 (vol. 3 of 9): 321ff. for the unity of the knower and the known; vol. 1, part 3 (vol. 3 of 9): 93ff. for transubstantial motion; vol. 1, part 3 (vol. 3 of 9): 244ff. for al-huduth al-zamani. And for basit al-haqiqah kull al-ashya' see vol. 3, part 1 (vol. 6 of 9): 110ff. and al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah, ed. S.J. Ashtiyani (Mashhad, 1967): 47- 8.]
24. One singularity of Mulla Sadra's philosophy is the idea of absolute unity (wahdat bi al-sirafah) of Sacred Essence of the Truth (al-Haqq; God). Another one is that the cause has presential and immediate knowledge (al-'ilm al-huduri) to its effect. This is while in Shifa', Ibn Sina explicitly advocates that God's unity is numerical. He also considers God's knowledge to the existents to be acquired knowledge (al-'ilm al-husuli). Mulla Sadra has disproved Ibn Sina's arguments on these two subjects, and these two are indeed among the crucial subjects in religious beliefs. See Ilahiyyat al-Shifa' (Qum, 1404/1984): 349; al-Asfar, vol. 3, part 1 (vol. 6 of 9): 12ff. and 189ff.
25. [Translator's note. 'The late 'Allamah Tabataba'i...once made a study of the number of philosophical problems dealt with by early and later Islamic philosophers. He once told us that, according to his study, there were over two hundred philosophical issues treated by the early Islamic philosophers and over six hundred by Mulla Sadra and his followers...an expansion which he attributed almost completely to the influence of the metaphysical and philosophical utterances of the Shi'ite Imams which became of ever greater concern to many Islamic philosophers, both Shi'ite and Sunni, from the time of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi onwards.' S.H. Nasr, 'The Qur'an and Hadith as source and inspiration of Islamic philosophy' in, ed. S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 2001): 39.]
26. [Translator's note. Gradation of being is the doctrine that views the existence of all existents as a single reality. Their differences arise due to possessing different degrees of existence; much like light, which is one reality, yet there are different intensities of that single reality. See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion about the philosophers' gradation of being

and the gnostics' unity of being.]

27. [Translator's note. See Bidayat al-Hikmah (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1418/1998), trans. and annotated by Sayyid 'Ali Quli Qara'i: The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics (London: ICAS Press, 2003); and Nihayat al-Hikmah (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1417/1996).]

28. [Translator's note. This statement, most widely narrated as hasbuna kitab Allah, is the claim made by the second Caliph when the Messenger of Allah asked for pen and paper in his deathbed in order to write (i.e. dictate) for the Muslims some advice so that they would never go astray. This argument was later used to deny the need for a God-selected leader after the death of the Honourable Prophet. See Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari (Istanbul: Dar al-Taba'ah al-'Amirah, 1981), 7:9 (Kitab al-Marda); Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad (Beirut, 1978), 1:336; Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqat al-Kubra (Beirut, 1376/1958), 2:241-4.]

29. [Translator's note. 'Al-haqiqah' means both truth and reality. It is related to God Himself, one of Whose names is al-Haqq or the Truth, and is that Whose discovery is the goal of Islamic philosophy.' S.H. Nasr, 'The Qur'an and Hadith as source and inspiration of Islamic
philosophy' in History of Islamic Philosophy, ed. S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 2001): 29.]

30. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, Nihayat al-Hikmah (Qum, 1417/1996): 73.

31. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 185. [Translator's note. The sermon numbers of Nahj al-Balaghah corresponds to the Subhi Salih edition, which is the most common way of numbering the sermons. The author used Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, the recent editions of which also follow the Subhi Salih numbering (4 vols. in one; Beirut, 2008).]

32. [Translator's note. See Chapter 4: Philosophical Discourses.]

33. The sermon is reported with its chain of transmission up to the Imam in Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), al-Tawhid (Qum, 1387/1967): 308. [Translator's note. For a summary of this sermon see Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 179.]

34. Ahmad ibn 'Ali Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj (Najaf, 1386/1966), 1:299.

35. Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (2nd ed., Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami, 1970), 6:86-104, in exegesis of verse 5:73.

36. 'Islamic Philosophers of 1000 AH' refers to Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Mulla Sadra), who advocated the absolute unity of God's Essence. He was born about 979 (1572) in Shiraz.

37. Our revered teacher, 'Allamah once said: 'When we were exploring and investigating about Imamate in traditions (ahadith), we came across twenty-five traditions in Bihar al-Anwar, reported from the credible and prominent books of the Sunnis. But then all we searched in their manuscripts and published books, we could not find those traditions. We even looked over a book from eight hundred years ago page by page, but not even one of those twenty-five narrations were there. The Sunnis have removed and dropped many traditions from their books.' Certainly had the series of Bihar al-Anwar been published with 'Allamah's annotations, these and other traditions would have been discussed as they came up, and also many other problems would have been solved. The cessation of his annotations was no doubt a great damage and crime against this Shi'a encyclopaedia in its new edition.

38. [Translator's note. An immaterial intellect (al-'aql al-mujarrad) is a being that is free of matter both in its essence and its actions, just like the angels.]

39. [Translator's note. A 'recurrent' or 'repeatedly reported' (mutawatir) tradition is one that has been transmitted by so many individuals that its credibility cannot be doubted. Ahad traditions (sing. wahid) are traditions that connect to the Imam through a single individual. If that individual is proved to be truthful, the narration will have conjectural credibility in extracting the shariah. However, on the subject of beliefs, the conjectural credibility is not sufficient; rather its credibility should become certain by other signs and pieces of evidence (qara'in).]

40. [Translator's note. 'Multiple' (mustafidah) traditions are the traditions that are reported by more than three transmitters, though they are not mutawatir.]

41. [Translator's note. Ijtihad literally means effort; but is specifically used in jurisprudence as making the utmost effort (based on the available resources) to extract and infer Islamic laws (the shariah). It is also defined as the competence and ability to extract and infer the law of the shariah, in any situation including the new ones. See M. Husayni Dashti, Ma'Árif wa Ma'Árif (Tehran, 2000), under ijtihad; W. Hallaq (1984) 'Was the Gate of ijtihad Closed?' International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 3-41.]

42. [Translator's note. See Usul-i Falsafah va Ravish-i Ri'alism, 5 vols. (Qum: Sadra, 1989-).]
43. [Translator's note. The first six (out of twenty) volumes of al-Mizan were translated into English by the late Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi and published by WOFIS (Tehran, 1983-2002). See: . The complete English translation is also forthcoming.]
44. '[This is] the Book of Allah by which you see, and by which you speak, and by which you hear. Some parts of it speak of [and elucidate] some other parts, and some parts of it bear witness to [and confirm] some other parts. It is consistent on [what it says about] Allah, and does not divert its follower from [the path of] Allah' (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 133).
45. After the publication [of the first edition] of this book (Mihr-i Taban), Sayyid Murtada Sadr, a descendant of the late Sayyid Hasan Sadr, told me, 'It would have been great had you written this memorial, Mihr-i Taban, in Arabic.' I, the nondescript author said, 'This memorial is to inform the Persian-speakers about him, for they are the ones who have heard of him and are more or less in contact with his thoughts; and his homeland and place of residence were Persian-speaking cities.' Mr. Sadr said, 'That is not so. 'Allamah is more famous in the Arab world than in Iran. Particularly in Egypt and Lebanon, there is no scholar or academic that does not admire him or refer to al-Mizan. Most academics in the universities and the seminaries have al-Mizan and revere 'Allamah's thoughts.'
'In that case,' I replied, 'Mihr-i Taban should be translated into Arabic for them.' [Translator's note. The Arabic translation was done by A. Nur al-Din and A. Mubarak, titled al-Shams al-Sati'ah (Beirut: Dar al-Mahajjat al-Bayda', 1997); available at .]
46. [Translator's note. Also published separately as al-Rasa'il al-Tawhidiyyah (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1415/1994) and al-Insan (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa', 1989).]
47. [Translator's note. See Risalat al-Wilayah (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Faqih, 1987), translated into English by F. Amjad and M. Dasht Bozorgi as The Return to Being: A Translation of Risalat al-Walayah (London: ICAS Press, 2010).]
48. [Translator's note. See Shi'ah dar Islam (Qum: Daftar-i-Tablighat-i-Islami, 1969), translated into English by S.H. Nasr as Shi'ite Islam (Albany: SUNY, 1979); Qur'an dar Islam (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1971), translated into English by A. Yate as The Qur'an in Islam: its impact and influence on the life of Muslims (London: Zahra Publications, 1987) and by A. Pazargadi (Tehran: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1984); Vahy ya Shu'ur-i Marmuz? (Qum: Dar al-Fikr, 198?).]
49. Number 821 (24 Aban 1361) of the journal Javanan-i Imruz is dedicated to the death anniversary of 'Allamah Tabataba'i. In an interview (p. 52), 'Allamah's eldest son, Sayyid 'Abd al-Baqi, narrates the following account from the late 'Allamah about Henri Corbin: 'One day, while we had not asked any question from my father, he turned to us and said with a particular glee and enthusiasm, "This Professor Corbin has embraced Islam, but is embarrassed to declare it!" A few days later, Professor Corbin gave a controversial lecture and a fervent speech in a foreign country about the Imam of the Time (Imam al-Zaman), may the Supreme Allah hasten his appearance. There he said, "I was almost going to lose my academic position, and be dismissed by the Church, for my discussions on Islam and for pursuing these ideas." When my father was informed of this, he was very delighted and said, "Did I not say that this Professor Corbin believes in Islam, but does not dare to declare it explicitly?"'
50. Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), al-Khisal, (Qum, 1983): 293.
51. [Translator's note. What is meant by worship and prayer here is particularly prescribed rituals, not the general sense of calling God and having connection with Him.]
52. Kitab-i Shi'ah ('The Shi'a Book') consists of 'Allamah's interviews with Corbin in 1338 AH solar (1959), and the book Risalat-i Tashayyu' dar Dunya-yi Imruz consists of their interviews in years 1339 and 1340 AH solar (1960-61).
53. See Sunan al-Nabi (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1419/1998), translated into English by T.R. Jaffer (Kitchener: IPH, 2007).
54. [Translator's note. Bustan-i Kitab-i Qum has published the series of 'Allamah's works (2007ff.). Also see Maktab-i Tashayyu' (Qum: Dar al-'Ilm, 1960); Risalat-i Tashayyu' dar Dunya-yi Imruz (Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islami, 1991); Islam va Insan-i Mu'asir
(Qum: Risalat, 1977); 'Ali wa al-Falsafat al-Ilahiyyah (Beirut: Dar al- Islamiyyah, 1980); Hashiyat al-Kifayah (Qum: Bunyad-i 'Ilmi va Fikri- yi 'Allamah Tabataba'i, 1947-8); Burhan (Qum: Daftar-i Tablighat-i Islami, 1992).]
55. See J.A. Ha'iri, Balaghat al-Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (Qum, 1425/2004): 234.
56. Part of an epic about Imam 'Ali by Safi al-Din al-Hilli, a student of Muhaqqiq al-Hilli. Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi, Safinat al-

Bihar (Tehran, 1970), 1:437.

57. [Translator's note. Tasawwuf (Sufism) and 'irfan (mysticism, gnosis) both refer to the esoteric aspects of Islam – both theoretical and practical. The difference is a matter of terminology more than anything else. 'It has been common among Shi'ite religious scholars since the Safavid period to refer to Islamic esotericism more often as 'irfan than as tasawwuf. This is due to historical reasons connected with the fact that the Safavids were at first a Sufi order and later gained political power, with the result that many wordly men sought to put on the garb of Sufism in order to gain political or social power, therefore discrediting Sufism in the eyes of the devout.' S.H. Nasr's note on Shi'ite Islam (Karachi, 1975): 120.]

58. [Translator's note. 'Allamah has extensively discussed the theoretical and practical dimensions of gnosis of the soul in al-Mizan, vol. 6, under verse 5:105. Elsewhere he mentions that, upon hearing this verse, one who 'has no intention but to remember God and forget all else...understands that the sole royal path which will guide him fully and completely is the path of "self-realisation". His true guide who is God Himself obliges him to know himself, to leave behind all other ways and to seek the path of self-knowledge, to see God through the window of his soul, gaining in this way the real object of his search. That is why the Prophet has said, "He who knows himself verily knows the Lord." And also he has said, "Those among you know God better who know themselves better."' Shi'ite Islam (Karachi, 1975): 116-17; trans. S.H. Nasr.]

59. There are countless hadiths about the necessity to observe these five. Here we only mention one hadith from Misbah al-Shari'ah (section 28). Imam Sadiq said: 'There is no [real] comfort for a believer except upon the Vision (liqa') of Allah, Supreme is He. But other than that, it [comfort in this world] is in four things: in a silence by which you discern the state of your heart and soul concerning your relation with your Creator; in a solitude whereby you save yourself from the visible and invisible harms of the world; in a hunger by which you kill the appetites and temptations [of the base soul and Satan]; and in little sleep by which you illuminate your heart, purify your nature, and refine your spirit.' The hadith mentions the four principles other than constant attention (dhikr); and obviously constant attention is also a key principle.

60. Khwansari, Rawdat al-Jannat, under Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Tusi, (Tehran, 1390-2/1970-2), 6:303.

61. Mulla Mahdi Naraqi was one of the five figures and pillars of Shi'ism who were all named Mahdi and were contemporary to each other. They were known as Mahadi al-Khamsah ('the Five Mahdis'): Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-'Ulum, Sayyid Mahdi Qazwini, Mulla Mahdi Naraqi, Mirza Mahdi Shahristani, and Sayyid Mahdi Khurasani Shahid. He was also my great grandfather from the mother's side.

62. Ayatollah Milani's son, Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali, narrated the following account about 'Allamah's competence in Persian poetry: 'One day, I, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, and two of his son-in-laws were riding in a car from Sabzivar to Mashhad. We decided to do musha'irah [a game of poetry, where one side reads a line of poetry and the opponent has to respond with a line starting with the last letter of the previous one, all out of memory. The game continues until one side cannot answer the opponent's line]. We three were on one side and 'Allamah alone was the other side; yet we, all three combined, could not beat him. 'Allamah would beat us every time, and he would not reply with only one line of poetry, but would mention several lines in support of one another. We were truly amazed by his competence in poetry and literature!'

Astan Quds newspaper (of Mashhad) published some of his poems on Wednesday, 15 Rabi' al-Thani 1410 AH lunar (24 Aban 1368 AH solar, 14 November 1989) (yr. 2, no. 549). With all regret the paper has considered that day as 'Allamah's death anniversary, based on solar- year calculations, even though the Islamic calendar is a lunar one. 'Allamah's date of death is 18 Muharram, not 15 Rabi' al-Thani. [Translator's note. See S.M.H. Husayni Tihrani, Risalah-yi Navin (Tehran: Sadra, 1406/1986)].

63. [Translator's note. Najd is the highlands of the Arabian Peninsula.]

64. [Translator's note. Qays ibn Maluwwah 'Amiri, known as Majnun, and Layla bint Sa'd are among the legendary symbols of love in the Islamic literature. Majnun became majnun (insane) due to his infatuation for his beloved, Layla. Various writers and poets have adopted their stories and have added their own details. It is not certain whether the two figures ever really existed or not.]

65. One of the wonderful and sensational poems of 'Allamah is the poem of 'The Butterfly and the Nightingale' ('Parvanah va Bulbul'), which he composed when he was leaving Tabriz [for Qum]:

Since the very day when I was born, A vow of love, my heart has sworn.
Since I began walking as a child, My heart has been heated and wild.
In ocean and land, and village and city, Nowhere did my heart find serenity.

Wherever I settle my luggage to stay, I have to take off my tent the next day.
I've not seen the Witness any day or night; I don't know the taste of pleasure or delight.
The wheel of the cosmos turns against my cheer; From the pull of the draw, my name doesn't appear.
From the palm and bowl of this world that is old, Tears and blood is the share that I hold.
But I was never a thorn in His way; Never did I make His efforts stray.

My guilt is only that I'm like a sea; Of darkness and evil, my heart is all free.
Last night I thought: how ruined is my heart; That blazed me up, like a flaming hearth.
At last my grief crushed my chest; And my leg of patience lost its rest.
The goblet and glass and candle my hand, I exited the room, which I couldn't stand.

I escaped from home at the midnight hour; By dawn I was at the garden of flower.
The time of spring, and a moonlit night; A field of flowers, and water on my right.
A fete full of songs, and every melody; The jasmine, the flower, and the cypress tree.
A flower was placed on every bush and tree; The jasmine was adorned, and that you could see.

The eastern flow of the morning breeze, Biting the flower, and the briar on its knees.
The harp of grass was jasmine's stance; At the other end, the briar was in dance.
The dazzling flirt of of the meadow's bride; The screens were removed; nothing to hide.
The songbird of dawn sang like a reed; The secrets of heart were disclosed indeed.

I, the glass, the goblet and the light, Slept in a corner, to be out of sight.
But my heart was fervent, with bubbles and fume; Embracing as it was, a darling of gloom.
My eyes, ears, and lips were shut; By the inside glow my head was hot.
At times, my eyes were opened by laughter, Only to be followed by tears thereafter.

The feat of the other end was totally different; A lamp and a butterfly; both were silent.
Quietly revolving around its dear; In oblivion it is, that mysteries appear.
The two ends of the garden, were in love and thirst: One was in rotation, the other was in burst.
The butterfly's world was concealed from the crowd; The nightingale's world was loud and proud.

The nightingale told the silent butterfly: 'Lo! From your chest, why not make a sigh?
With your burning heart, you deserve to thrive; In front of the beloved, it's OK to be live.'
It told the songbird, 'Be quiet, my friend! You're tied in a trap, and that you should mend.
If an ardent lover, you've been so far, So loud and disturbed, tell me why you are?'

It said, 'The beloved gives me this craze, I'm out of myself, I can't coin a phrase.'
'Then tell me, oh my bird, how have you survived? If in this love you've always been tied?
The lightning of love, with its strikes, Burns the lover's name and fame and the like.
Either do think not of your soul-mates and sweetheart; Or forget altogether about your soul and heart.
Either do not talk about the treasure, Or take the hardships, and forget your pleasure.'

The butterfly was done giving that advice, Was burdened by its self, set for sacrifice.
Extinguished it was as it jumped in the flame, Into oblivion, forgotten and tame.

And he has a qasidah (long ode) about renouncing this world (dunya) and having complete attention toward the Supreme Allah, which is mentioned at the end of this book. There is also another fascinating and wonderful poem of his, concerning clinging to Islam, endeavouring to achieve the Cherished Destination, and ignoring the affairs of this world. He composed it upon the decease of the late Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hujjat Kuh-Kamari. It is truly a fine fascinating poem. See Sharif al-Razi, Ganjinah-yi Danishmandan (The Treasury of the Scholars), under the section about the life of the late Ayatollah Hujjat [Kuh-Kamari], may Allah's mercy be upon him, (Tehran, 1973), 1:316-17. The complete poem is:

Alas! The sun of guidance departed; Alas! The world of excellence departed.
The king of piety and knowledge departed, Alas, Ayatollah Hujjat departed.
The darkness of the days will ever be scattered? The pillars of Islam – they have shattered.
The sky of wisdom has truly crashed; The world of art is ruined and smashed.

The eye of knowledge started to bleed; Oh, a resurrection appeared indeed.
He freed himself of the world and its pains; And set up his tent, in the higher planes.
That heavenly bird with its divine soul, Left the ugly world, flying for its goal;
It chants a song in gardens of relief, A message for those that are sitting in grief.

A message that's like Gabriel's song, The ear of reason hears it along:
O friends, this life does not persist; So get on with deeds, that I shall insist.
Never sit back from working and action; Never complain of the body's infliction.
The treasure in the ruins is not snakeless; The flowers that you aim are not thornless.

Only Islam is what you should follow; Sweet or bitter, both you should swallow.
Endeavour and move, and tread with heed; Let go of your blood, if there is a need.
Blood is pretty in a battlefield; Tulip is the best flower in the field.
The men who are noble with decency of deed, Have loved and aimed for the Truth indeed.

Their bodies with their blood, coloured in a blend; Thus they have cleared the path to this end.
They've cut the straps with their cutting sword; A castle of knowledge, they've built for their Lord.
Don't be enslaved by this world and this place; Don't let it slow your moving and your pace.
Do not let go of the goal that you chase; Don't let your name fall into disgrace.

If your heart darkens, and the purity goes, The castle of Islam is destroyed by the foes.
Truth is nothing but Islam and its aim; No name is above its beautiful name.
Virtue are achieved, truly by this path; Without it, the world is truly in wrath.
The castle of Islam, strong it shall be; Its land and borders always be free.

66. The story of this humble being in the Shrine of Imam Rida. I, the lowest being, settled in the sanctified city of Mashhad on 26 Jumada al-Thani 1400 (12 May 1980). Before that, I usually used to go to there during the summer, along with all my family and children. This story is about our visit in the summer of 1393 (1973), when Ayatollah Milani and 'Allamah Ayatollah Tabataba'i were both living. One day I went to the Shrine two hours before noon. There, I was in a very pleasant [spiritual] state. I, along with some friends, went to Masjid Gawhar-Shad for the noon prayer, and performed it individually. On our way out, we had to go through the doors opening to the bazaar next to the Great Courtyard (sahn-i buzurg). Since the congregational prayers of Masjid Gawhar-Shad had also ended, people were all exiting and the congestion of the crowd had narrowed the way. There, as I was about to exit, I kissed the mosque's door to the shoe depository.
When I kissed the door, suddenly I heard someone telling me, 'Sir! What is with kissing the wood?'
I do not know what that sound did to me! It was just like a spark that hits the heart and makes one unconscious. I was out of my own control, 'Why not kiss it? Why not?! The wood of the Shrine is to be kissed, the shoes of the pilgrims of the Shrine are to be kissed, the dust under the feet of the pilgrims of the Shrine is to be kissed,' shouting these aloud. And suddenly, I threw myself on the ground, in the middle of the crowd, and started putting the dust and earth on my face. 'See! This is how it is to be kissed!' and I kept doing that. Then I got up and set off for home.
'Sir!' the speaker said, 'What did I say? I did not do any insult!' 'What else did you want to say?!' I replied, 'And what else did you want to do?! This is not wood; it is the wood of the Shrine's shoe depository. Here is the Shrine of Hadrat 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida. Here is where the angels circulate. Here is where the houris, the intimates and the prophets prostrate. Here is the Throne of the All-Merciful,' and so on and so forth.
He said, 'Sir! I am a Muslim! I am a Shi'a; I pay khums and zakah [mandatory religious dues]. Just this morning I paid my religious dues to Ayatollah Milani!'

‘Keep your khums for yourself!’ I said. ‘The Imam has no need for your residual money! Keep that as a bounty for yourself. What Imam wants from you is courtesy! Why are you not courteous?! I swear to God, I will not rest until the Day of Resurrection, when I throw you into fire on your face with my own hands!’
At this time, my brother-in-law drew near me and said, ‘I know this man. He is a faithful person and was a devotee of your late father!’
I said, ‘Whoever he may be! Satan ended up in hell for abandoning courtesy!’
Then as I was heading toward the bazaar on my way home, that man came after me saying, ‘Forgive me sir! I adjure you by God, forgive me!’ until we entered the Great Courtyard.
‘Who am I to forgive you?’ I said, ‘I am nobody. You did not insult me. You insulted Imam Rida, and that is not excusable! Our grand scholars – the ‘allamahs, the likes of Shaykh al-Tusi, Khwajah Nasir, Shaykh al-Mufid and Mulla Sadra – all succumb to this sanctuary. Their honour is to genuflect at this Shrine. And [then] you say what is with kissing the wood!?’
He said, ‘I did wrong; I repent! I will not do such wrong again!’ ‘And I feel not a bit of animosity toward you in my heart!’ I replied. ‘If you are really penitent, then the doors of the heavens are open to you!’ and by that time people were drawn toward us from every direction in the Great Courtyard. At that point I went home.

That afternoon, this humble being attended the presence of our noble teacher and master, the late Ayatollah Tabataba’i (with whom may Allah be pleased). We had a precious conversation, where he talked about some ‘flares’ that hit one’s heart and blow up the person, as mentioned in this poem of Hafiz:
The infatuated Majnun lost himself from then on, For a light that flashed from Layla’s house at dawn.
As a result, I recalled that day’s incident and recounted it for him, and asked, ‘Was this also one of those flares?’ He paused for a long time, contemplating with his head down, and did not say anything.
[That aside,] The late Ayatollah Milani used to sit in the parlour of his house one hour before sunset. And ‘Allamah Ayatollah Tabataba’i would either meet him there, after which they would to go to the Holy Shrine for sunset prayer, or he would attend Ayatollah Milani’s congregational prayer, where he would simply sit in one of the lines in the back of the crowd, like an ordinary student.
Approximately two or three days after I narrated my story for our honourable teacher, I encountered an old friend of mine, who told me, ‘Yesterday I went to Ayatollah Milani’s house, where ‘Allamah Tabataba’i was telling a detailed account of one of the scholars of Tehran, who had kissed the door of the shoe depository of Masjid Gawhar-Shad. He was crying from the beginning to the end of the account. Then he joyfully said, “All praise is to Allah, for there are still some scholars who are so attentive toward the religious sites and show respect for the sacred status of the pure Imams.” He did not mention the name of that scholar, but based on the signs, I inferred that it was you. Was that so?’
I said, ‘Yes, the story was mine.’ And thus, since ‘Allamah had recounted the incident while weeping, I realised that his silence and reflection were signs of his satisfaction and approval of my action. May Allah’s extensive mercy be upon him.

67. [Translator’s note. In Shi’a law, Imam’s Share is half of the khums (an obligatory religious duty). The fund should be spent for certain causes including the spreading and promotion of the religion. See M. Husayni Dashti, Ma’Árif wa Ma’Árif (Tehran, 2000), under sahm-i Imam.]
68. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 193.
69. Ibid.
70. من نه آن رندم كه ترك شاهد و ساغركنم
محتسب داند كه من اين كارها كمتر كنم
71. [Translator’s note. ‘Science’ is the common translation of the word ‘ilm, and both terms are nowadays used almost exclusively for natural and experimental sciences. However, in traditional and religious pieces, science has a wider meaning. It includes both narrative and intellectual forms of knowledge. ‘The word ‘ilm means science in its most universal sense, like the Latin scientia, and applies to the religious as well as intellectual, rational and philosophical forms of knowledge. Generally it is distinguished from ma’rifah or ‘irfan which is Divine knowledge and may be compared to the Latin sapientia.’ S.H. Nasr’s note on Shi’ite Islam (Karachi, 1975): 71.]
72. A Jewish scholar came to Imam ‘Ali and said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, when did your Lord exist?’
‘May your mother mourn on her child!’ he replied. ‘When ever did He not exist so that one may ask “when did He exist?”

My Lord existed before the yore with no precedence, and will exist after the forthcoming without anything after Him. He has no ending or finish; all ends fall short of Him, so He is the End of every end.'
That person asked 'So are you a prophet, O Commander of the Faithful?'
'Pity for you!' he replied, 'I am only a servant among Muhammad's servants (peace and mercy be upon him and his family).'
Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), al-Tawhid (Qum, 1416/1885): 174, narrating with its chain of transmission, from Abu al- Hasan al-Musili, from Imam Sadiq.
At the end of his commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, Ibn Abi al-Hadid presents a thousand sayings from the Commander of the Faithful. Number 57 is: 'As the fathers are means for [giving] life, the teachers of wisdom and religion are indeed the means of its [life's] betterment.' (Cairo, 1959-64), 20:261.
73. A hadith is reported from the Noble Messenger that 'Whoever teaches something to anyone becomes his owner.' Then he was asked, 'So can he sell that person?' He said, 'No, but he orders and forbids him.' Shaykh 'Abbas al-Qummi, Safinat al-Bihar (Tehran, 1970), 2:225, from Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar (Beirut, 1983), 105:16.
74. 'The Divan Attributed to the Commander of the Faithful' ('Diwan-i Mansub bih Amir al-Mu'minin'). See Maybudi Yazdi's Sharh on the Diwan (Tehran, 2000): 2.
75. Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, al-Kafi (al-Usul) (3rd ed., Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1388/1968), 1:26; from Ahmad ibn Muhammad, from an unmentioned line of transmitters (marfu').
76. Ibid.: 25; from Ahmad ibn Muhammad, with incomplete line of transmission (mursal).
77. Ibid.: 25.
78. Ibid., 2:13.
79. Ibid.: 15.
80. Ibid.: 15.
81. [Translator's note. Malakut, jabarut, and lahut are three stages of the simple reality of being (wujud), which extends from God's Essence at the infinite degree of being to the weakest beings. In theoretical mysticism ('irfan), malakut is the realm of the angels (the imaginal world), jabarut is the realm of the immaterial intellects, and lahut is the realm of manifestation of God's names (asma').]
82. Kulayni, al-Kafi (al-Usul), 1:16; from Hisham ibn Hakam, from an unmentioned line of transition (marfu').
83. Ibid.: 27; from Muhammad ibn Yahya (marfu').
84. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 215. Part of a supplication for permission of entrance (idhn al-dukhul) to the sanctified cellar (sardab) of Imam al-Zaman and the shrines of the other Imams is: 'Glorified art Thee, so Kind Thou art, and there is no deity but Thee. Such a Just King Thou art; such that Thy creation conformeth to how Thou created the intellects, and Thy decree [i.e. shariah] agreeth with what Thou placed in the intellect and the narration.' ('Allamah Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, 99:116)
85. 'Allamah Bahr al-'Ulum, Risalah-yi Sayr wa Suluk: 168-9.
86. There is a similar tradition by Imam 'Ali: 'Of the people of the world, two parties break my back: a man who is knowledgeable in speech but wrongdoer in action, and a man who has an ignorant heart but is a worshiper. The former disguises his wrongdoing by his tongue, and the latter disguises his ignorance with his worships. So fear and refrain from the wrongdoers among the scholars, and the ignorant among the worshipers; they are the deception of the deceived. I heard the Messenger of Allah – peace be upon him and his family – saying, 'O 'Ali, the fatality of my nation rests in the hands of a (or every) hypocrite who is erudite in speech.' (Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi [Shaykh al-Saduq], al-Khisal [Qum, 1983]: 69).
In another report he said: 'The impudent scholar and the ignorant worshipper break my back. The ignorant deceives the people with his worshiping, and the scholar misleads them with his impudence.' (Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, 2:111)
And it is reported from Imam Sadiq that: 'Two parties break my back: the offending scholar and the ignorant worshipper. One averts people from his knowledge by his wrongdoing, and one averts people from his worship by his ignorance.' (Ibid., 1:208)
87. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 222.
88. [Translator's note. 'Allamah remarried after the death of his first wife.]

89. ‘Allamah’s burial ceremony was postponed until the next day in order to allow people of eminence and piety from other cities to attend. His body was accompanied and followed by all classes of people and thousands of students (tullab) who were in deep grief and sombreness. The body was brought it to the holy courtyard of Hadrat Ma’sumah, two hours before noon on the nineteenth of Muharram. The Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Rida Gulpayigani performed his funeral prayer. ‘Allamah is buried in the upper side of Hadrat Ma’sumah’s holy tomb, near the tomb of the late Ayatollah Ha’iri Yazdi. It was the will of the Supreme Deity that ‘Allamah was buried right next to the tomb of my father, Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq Tihrani.
‘Allamah’s gravestone was placed seven years after his death. It reads:

‘Surely we belong to Allah and to Him we return.’ A garden of the gardens of paradise: ‘Enter in peace and security.’
The Pride of Islam and the Muslims, the ascender to the acmes of Qur’anic truths, the founder of spreading the principles of divine teachings in the Imamite Theological School of Qum, the author of the grand exegesis, al-Mizan, the ascender to the paradise of God’s Essence: ‘Allamah al-Hajj al-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Tabataba’i, may his soul be sanctified. He departed to the abode of grace and bliss, while he accepted the call of ‘O thee, the reassured soul, return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing’ on the morning of eighteenth of Muharram 1402 AH. May he be resurrected with those whom Allah has blessed.

And his fine image is placed above his head, beneath which a sentence from him is written: ‘Shi’ism is the reality of following the tradition (sunnah) of the Messenger of God, which manifests in guardianship (wilayah).’ [Note: ‘Allamah’s picture was removed from his grave later on.]

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