

Knowledge

Story n. 1

Classes of philosophy were looked down upon when ‘Allamah first came to Qum, and much effort was put into closing his philosophy classes. However his gracious and wise manner and his kindly interactions with Ayatullah Al-Uzma Burujredi won over some of his critics and decreased the influence of others.

‘Allamah did not confine himself to the study of general philosophy. With the establishment of private sessions with prized students such as Shahid Mutahhari, he began to study Western philosophies, in particular Dialectic Materialism. Together they [‘Allamah and Shahid Mutahhari] wrote one of the best books available in this field.

‘Allamah’s invaluable role in making the world aware about Islam, the teachings of Shi’ism, Islamic Philosophy and Gnosticism (*‘Irfan*), and in presenting in writing the original ethos of Shi’sim, was a great and invaluable service that could only have been accomplished by such a man.

An indication of his valuable services is that it would be hard to find a single scholar in all of Iran and in many parts of the world [today] who has not taken from the harvest of knowledge and character of ‘Allamah, and who has not directly or indirectly benefited from him.

Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi

Story n. 2

‘Allamah Tabataba’i is an exemplar of men of worth and greatness. This man is so very remarkable and worthy that even after 100 years it will be necessary to sit and ponder and analyze his thoughts in order to fully understand his worth.

This man is truly among the most valuable servants of Islam. He is genuinely an embodiment of God–

consciousness (*taqwa*) and spirituality. He has traversed exceptionally high levels of self-purification and *taqwa*. For many long years I have benefited from the blessed presence of this great individual.

To honor the likes of this great man is to honor knowledge itself, and to honor society... He is known as a distinguished intellectual, not only in the Islamic world but in the non-Islamic world as well.

Shahid Mutahhari

Story n. 3

One of 'Allamah Tabataba'i's students describes the way in which he met his teacher and began to study under him:

It was the year 1364 S (1985). I had moved to Qum in order to pursue my studies. I took up residence in Ayatullah Hujjat's school (Hujjatiyya), and was busy with my studies and discussions. The school building was very small and as a result the late Ayatullah Hujjat had bought the adjacent land in order to expand his school and build a new and spacious building; one that which, in accordance with the Islamic style of school, would take care of all the needs of its students.

Many engineers from Tehran and elsewhere came and presented various plans, but every one of them had some flaw and was rejected by Ayatullah Hujjat. This situation carried on for some time. Finally we heard that a Sayyid from Tabriz had come and drawn up a comprehensive and complete plan that was approved by Ayatullah Hujjat.

We were very curious to meet this Sayyid. Afterwards we heard that he had arrived in Qum from Tabriz, that he was known by 'Qadhi,¹ that he was very knowledgeable in mathematics and philosophy, and that he had begun philosophy classes at the Hawza.

We went to his house and realized that this celebrated and well-known man was the same Sayyid that we used to see walking every day in the alleys. Never did we assume that he was an intellectual (let alone a scholar of many sciences). With a tiny burlap turban (*emama*) blue in color, without socks and with clothes simpler than average, he used to go back and forth in the alleys of Qum and live in an extremely small and simple home.

We were so enamored by 'Allamah Tabataba'i, and our desire to study with him so great, that we requested a private philosophy class with him. He magnanimously agreed and thereafter we were fortunate to be able to study both *hayate qadim* and Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) with him.

Every day that passed our love for, and our relationship with 'Allamah, deepened, because he was a straightforward, noble, polite, and moral man free of any corruption. At the same time he was like a kind brother and compassionate friend to us. In the evenings when he would come to his room, in addition to the regular lesson, he would speak about the Qur'an and knowledge of God Almighty.

Greatness and presence, tranquility and dignity, all manifested themselves in his existence. He was an ocean of knowledge that when penetrated, could provide the answer to every question. He would answer questions gently yet firmly, and with propriety and seriousness. Despite the fact that our debate and our impudence would occasionally reach high levels, never once did he raise his voice, always maintaining his patience and composure.

‘Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tehrani

Story n. 4

‘Allamah Tabataba’i’s knowledge was so wide that he used to say:

“If the opportunity arose, I could explain all the issues of the Qur’an from a single small sura”.

Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli

Story n. 5

In the year 1350 S (1970), we wanted to visit Makkah. It was winter, snowy and cold. We went to see ‘Allamah Tabataba’i to convey our greetings and say our goodbyes. When our conversation came to an end, I said to him, “*Give us some advice that we can use during our travel, and that can be a provision for our journey!*”

He read this verse in which God says: ***Therefore remember Me, I will remember you (Sura Baqara, 2: 152)***. ‘Allamah said:

“Remember God so that God might remember you as well. When God remembers a human being, He delivers him from ignorance. When God the All-Powerful remembers a human being who is in the midst of some work, he will never find himself incapable of doing something. And if a human being were to have a moral problem, God, who possesses the Divine and Beautiful Names and is described by these great Names, would most definitely remember him, removing the difficulty and freeing him of that problem”.

Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli

Story n. 6

‘Allamah once told us that he visited the outskirts of Tehran one summer, where ideas of Communism and Materialism were prevalent. Some of those who held materialist views wanted to freely discuss their thoughts with him. He went to them and participated in a discussion from morning until evening, that may have lasted 8 hours.

He said, *"I discussed with this one individual using the view point of burhane sididqiyyin (a Shi'ite philosophical proof of the existence of God)".* Thereafter, this individual who was a Marxist saw one of his peers on a street in Tehran who asked him, *"where did you reach in your visit and discussion with Agha Tabataba'i?"*

He replied, "Agha Tabataba'i has made me a monotheist. He spent eight hours in discussion with us, and in the process he made one communist a believer in God and one Marxist a monotheist. He listened to every non-believer's insult yet never took offense and never quarreled".

Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli

Story n. 7

Once 'Allamah Tabataba'i was informed that the Shah had decided to give him a PhD in philosophy. He became very upset and announced that under no circumstances would he accept such a thing. The head of the faculty of theology approached 'Allamah and insisted a great deal, but he continued to decline. In the end, after a great deal of persistence, the head of the faculty said, *"If you don't accept, the Shah will become angry and displeased..."* 'Allamah responded explicitly, *"I have absolutely no fear of the Shah, and am not ready to accept this doctorate"*.

'Allamah's daughter

Story n. 8

'Allamah Tabataba'i's Nastaliq and Shekaste handwriting [forms of Persian Calligraphy] were one of the best and most beautiful examples of calligraphy. Even though his hand was unsteady and his handwriting shaky towards the end of his life because of an illness of the nerves and tremors in his hand, the essence of the handwriting indicated that he was an expert in this art. He himself used to say, *"Samples of my handwriting remain from my youth and when I look at them I am amazed that this is my writing!"*

'Allamah Tabataba'i used to say:

Many days my brother and I would go to the outskirts of Tabriz near the foot of the mountain and the green hills, and spend the entire day from morning till dusk writing calligraphy... We used to spend all our money and time in buying paper and practicing calligraphy on it.

Story n. 9

During the days when 'Allamah Tabataba'i was a learned scholar, a shining light, and a gathering place of knowledge and insight...in the days when he would walk the streets of Qum with clothes made of

burlap, his outward appearance simpler than normal, staff in hand, going to and from the sacred shrine of Hazrat Ma'suma (sa), the gaze of Orientalists and Western thinkers fell on the clear intensity of his thought and depth of his insight. His careful scrutiny, innovation, originality and resolute thought resulted in a growing suggestion in their minds.

The American government requested the Shah of Iran (Muhammad Reza Pahlavi) that 'Allamah be invited to teach Eastern philosophy in American universities!

In order to carry out this important request, Muhammad Reza sought help from Ayatullah al-Uzma Burujerdi – May God be pleased with him – informing him of the American request. Ayatullah Burujerdi in returned conveyed the Shah's message to 'Allamah. But 'Allamah's profound insight and sound judgment caused him to prefer a simple life, closeness with eminent scholars, a role in the spiritual atmosphere of Qum, and in training scholars in the hawza. As a result of all this, he rejected the request of the American government.

'Allamah Tehrani

- ¹. When he first arrived in Qum, 'Allama Tabataba'i was known as Qadhi because from among the lineage of Sadr Qadhi was more well known in Azerbaijan. However he himself showed preference for the name 'Tabataba'i'.

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