

Ijtihad and Renewal in Qur'anic Hermeneutics:
An Analysis of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*

By

Louis Abraham Medoff

B.A. (Brandeis University) 1997
M.A. (University of California, Berkeley) 2000

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Near Eastern Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Hamid Algar, Chair
Assistant Professor Shahwali Ahmadi
Assistant Professor Jeffrey Hadler

Spring 2007

UMI Number: 3275516

Copyright 2007 by
Medoff, Louis Abraham

All rights reserved.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3275516

Copyright 2007 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Ijtihad and Renewal in Qur'anic Hermeneutics:
An Analysis of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i's *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*

© 2007

by Louis Abraham Medoff

Abstract

Ijtihad and Renewal in Qur'anic Hermeneutics:

An Analysis of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i's *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*

By

Louis Abraham Medoff

Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Hamid Algar, Chair

During the last fourteen centuries of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), a few broad methodological trends can be discerned. From the earliest commentaries attributed to the companions of the Prophet to the works of contemporary modernists, commentators have relied almost exclusively on narration (*tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*) to explain each verse in an atomistic manner. The formal features of the Qur'an, particularly its linguistic and grammatical issues, have also taken an inordinate amount of exegetical attention. Although the classical scholars of exegesis affirmed that the Qur'an explains itself—as promoted in their own writings concerning “the principles of tafsir” (*uṣūl al-tafsīr*)—in practice the *mufasssīrīn* relied heavily on non-Qur'anic texts to interpret the Qur'an, especially the views of the companions and successors, jurists and theologians, philosophers and mystics.

Recently the Iranian scholar and philosopher Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i (1321/1904-1402/1981) wrote a commentary, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, that embodied

the methodology of “letting the Book speak for itself” (*iṣṭintāq*), or tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an. This exegesis attempts to make the Qur’an the standard for interpreting its own foundational teachings. Although Ṭabāṭabā’i’s tafsir and his methodology have been widely commented on as both significant and distinctive, the precise meaning of his methodology and many of its unique characteristics have not been adequately identified and discussed. By examining the original twenty-volume Arabic commentary as well as other Arabic and Persian sources, this dissertation will analyze the meaning of valid tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an and invalid tafsir by personal opinions (*tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*) in light of Ṭabāṭabā’i’s exegetical ijtihad in *al-Mizān*, and highlight his efforts to establish an authentic Qur’anic hermeneutic based on correct foundational principles.

Table of Contents

Introduction	ii
Acknowledgments	xii
Chapter One: ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī: Consummate Mujtahid	1
Chapter Two: Finding the Balance in Qur’anic Hermeneutics	20
Chapter Three: Problems with <i>Tafsīr bi-l-Riwāyāt</i>	45
Chapter Four: Philosophical and Qur’anic Realities	60
Chapter Five: Materialism as Negative Philosophy and Mysticism as Meta-Philosophy	78
Chapter Six: <i>Āyāt al-Ghurar</i> : Keys to the Balance	95
Chapter Seven: After <i>al-Mīzān</i>	112
Conclusion	137
Bibliography	139

Introduction

About fifty years ago, an eminent Shī'ī Muslim scholar in Iran began work on a unique exegesis of the Qur'an. The work, taking nearly 20 years to complete and comprising 20 volumes, was the result of his efforts to produce an exegesis reflecting not only contemporary issues, but more importantly embodying an authentic approach to tafsir. The scholar was 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1904-1981/1321-1402) and the work *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. The style of exegesis, acquired from one of his teachers, was the interpretation of one verse by another, or tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*). While historically the author of *al-Mizān* was not the first to broach the idea of allowing the Qur'an to interpret itself, it was his belief that in practice it had never been properly executed, and that his work implements the methodology in an unprecedented manner.

Other scholars of the Shī'ī teaching institutions, the *hawzah*, including but not exclusively Ṭabāṭabā'ī's students, have extolled the work with an array of superlatives. His foremost student, Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, has forcefully stated that it is the best tafsir in the history of Islam.¹ Others have said that it will take 200 years for it to be fully appreciated², and another that it is the product of divine inspiration (*ilhām*).³ While a cynical observer might reply that this reverential praise would be expected from students

¹ Jawād 'Alī Kassār, *al-Manhaj al-'Aqā'idī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān: Ḥiwār ma'a al-Sayyid Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī*. (n.p., Dār Farāqid, 1424), 9.

² *Ibid.* 9-10.

³ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī Tihirānī, *Mihr-i Tābān*. (n.p. Intishārāt-i Bāqir al-'Ulūm, n.d.), 44-5.

close to the author, Western specialists have also noted *al-Mizān*'s distinguished position in Qur'anic exegesis.⁴

Despite the general recognition of the importance of *al-Mizān* in Islamic intellectual history, there has not been much detailed or incisive investigation of its style, especially from scholars of Islam in the West. Usually the analysis entails commonplace observations about Ṭabāṭabā'ī's eminent position among contemporary Muslim scholars, particularly among the Shī'ah and the philosophers, and remarks that his hermeneutics was tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, or that his concerns involve contemporary issues facing the Muslim world.⁵

This dissertation intends broadly to highlight Ṭabāṭabā'ī's tempered renewal of the overall stagnant exegetical tradition and aims specifically to analyze the manner of hermeneutical ijtihad displayed in his unique tafsir. It does not seek to be a definitive study of *al-Mizān*; after an extended period of research this writer believes the statements of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's students concerning its encyclopedic depth and breath to be no mere hyperbole, so perhaps no single analysis can aspire to be final. However, there is a proverb, frequently quoted in the *ḥawzah*, saying, "what cannot be grasped completely should not be abandoned completely" (*mā lā yudraku kulluhu lā yutraku kulluh*) and with this in mind it is hoped that the following chapters will elucidate some significant features of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's exegetical methodology overlooked by previous commentators.

⁴ For example Jane McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88; and Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: Volume One*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 39.

⁵ Ṭabāṭabā'ī's tafsir is sometimes labeled "modernist". While it is true that the style of *al-Mizān* is not a slavish imitation of the classical exegetes, and that the author addresses many contemporary issues in its pages, his tafsir cannot be categorized as modernist except in a loose sense of the word. Ṭabāṭabā'ī was thoroughly informed by the classical Islamic sciences, and he was no less critical of the modernists or crypto-materialists, as he would characterize them, than of the strict traditionalists.

Perhaps the standard study of *al-Mizān* is Awsī's *Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī wa Manhajuhu fī Tafsīrihi al-Mizān*. Awsī's analysis is commendable on many levels; he has provided a useful historical background of the author of *al-Mizān*, included a unique autobiography personally provided by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, extensively cited his tafsir and hadith sources, and tried to explain the author's approach to tafsir, hadith, theology and philosophy including examples from *al-Mizān*. However, it cannot be said that Awsī's work is final or authoritative, since it needs elaboration in a number of areas. It is hoped that this dissertation will provide augmentation in some of these areas, above all Ṭabāṭabā'ī's expansive understanding of *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*, his views on divine philosophy and its place in exegesis, and his own contribution to the exegetical sciences, the *āyāt al-ghurar*.

There are number of reasons why despite its renown *al-Mizān* has not received adequate examination in Islamic studies. These reasons pertain both to the work's style and to its substance, which in turn reflect the specific methodology of the *ḥawzah*. This is natural since the author of *al-Mizān* was thoroughly grounded in the style and heritage of the *ḥawzah*. In terms of language, the *ḥawzah* prefers a laconic and terse style, and the Arabic used tends towards density and uncommon vocabulary. Considering it was his third language⁶, Ṭabāṭabā'ī in *al-Mizān* displays a flowing Arabic, although in the *ḥawzah* tradition he eschews superfluous words and avails himself of implicit and somewhat allusive language. Furthermore, in the *ḥawzah* it is generally considered "ill-mannered" (*bī-adab*) to criticize or even praise others by name; the ideal is "what is said is more important than who said it". Ṭabāṭabā'ī was particularly faithful to this *ḥawzah* tradition. While in certain instances he critiques modernists like Rashīd Riḍā by name, or

⁶ His first language being Turkish, his second Persian.

calls the overtly literal traditionalists by the pejorative title *hashwīyah*, more often than not he refers to the opinions of others by vague statements like “someone has said”. This presents another hurdle in the examination of his exegetical views.

In terms of content, the obstacles to a proper evaluation of *al-Mīzān* by a researcher unacquainted with the intellectual heritage of the *hawzah* are even more significant. While it is true that Ṭabāṭabā’ī reached out to a larger and more contemporary audience than the traditionally trained scholars, especially in the “tafsir proper” (*bayān*) and sociopolitical discussions of his exegesis, at heart his work, particularly its theological, philosophical, narrative, and academic discussions, is deeply informed by the terminology and concepts of the *hawzah*. As is well-known, Ṭabāṭabā’ī was primarily a philosopher, and while for reasons which will be explained in this dissertation his tafsir is not philosophical per se, he was still deeply immersed in the “rational sciences”, namely classical logic and post-Avicennan philosophy. Throughout *al-Mīzān*, both explicitly and implicitly, Ṭabāṭabā’ī utilizes the terms and concepts of logic and philosophy as taught in the *hawzah*, and needless to say, these fields are rarely if ever studied elsewhere, including Muslim countries, with the attention they receive in the *hawzah*. In the West, logic and philosophy are generally considered external to Islamic studies, properly belonging in philosophy departments, while philosophy departments deem the logic and philosophy taught in the *hawzah* to be part of religious studies, because of their resemblance to Medieval Scholasticism. Without the appropriate background in classical logic and post-Avicennan philosophy, much of *al-Mīzān* remains inscrutable.

Given the encyclopedic depth and breath of *al-Mizān*, it is also desirable to have as much background as possible in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's other major works before attempting to analyze his monumental tafsir. Besides *al-Mizān*, many of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's other major works are specialty studies in the rational sciences written with a *hawzah* audience in mind. Many of these works, especially those written before *al-Mizān*, have been published only recently.⁷ Among Ṭabāṭabā'ī's general works the one that perhaps has received the least attention, *Qur'ān dar Islām*, is by far the most important for understanding his hermeneutical concerns.

Besides the aforementioned factors, some attention to the teaching and writings of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's students, some of whom are still active in the *hawzah*, sheds light not only on the unique hermeneutics of *al-Mizān*, but also on the contemporary Shī'ī scholarly milieu. As far as this writer is aware all previous studies, in particular those by Western writers, have paid scant attention to their scholarly activities as a key resource for understanding Ṭabāṭabā'ī's exegetical approach. This is perhaps due to the general stylistic and physical inaccessibility of their lectures and writings, as well as their being of recent date. In particular two of these successors, Ayatullahs Jawādī Āmulī and Kamāl Ḥaydarī, have many perceptive books, articles, lectures and discussions concerning the style and contents of *al-Mizān*. Besides their familiarity with the intellectual environment of the *hawzah*, their personal relations with Ṭabāṭabā'ī or his associates give these successors special insight into *al-Mizān* and the outlook of its author unavailable elsewhere. While this writer neither is an expert in classical logic or Sadrian philosophy, nor claims mastery of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's specialty works, nor has extensive contact with his

⁷ A good example is the significant *Tafsīr al-Bayān fī-l-Muwāqafat bayn al-Ḥadīth wa-l-Qur'ān*, written before *al-Mizān* but published only in 2006.

intellectual successors, whenever possible in this dissertation the relevant and available materials from these resources will drawn on to elucidate Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hermeneutics.

The analysis of *al-Mizān* and Ṭabāṭabā'ī's ijtihad in tafsir is organized into the following seven chapters. Chapter One presents a biography of the 'Allāmah as a backdrop for his approach to the study of Islam in general and tafsir in particular. This chapter draws upon Hamid Algar's recent detailed biography in English, as well as the definitive account in Persian, 'Allāmah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī Tihirānī's *Mihr-i Tābān*. Tihirānī's biography is a good example of an insightful and personal account of the author of *al-Mizān* by a close student that is well-known in the *ḥawzah* but practically neglected outside it.

Chapter Two analyzes the central issue of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hermeneutics, specifically his definition of valid and invalid tafsir. Three representative texts are selected to examine Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hermeneutical ijtihad. The first is the prologue to *al-Mizān*, the second a passage in an important treatise on the Qur'an, and the third the discussion on invalid tafsir, or *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*, from Volume Three of *al-Mizān*. Special emphasis is placed on Ṭabāṭabā'ī's precise identification of the deficiencies of the classical methodologies, or in other words his incisive views on *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*.

Chapter Three continues the analysis of the author of *al-Mizān*'s approach to valid and invalid tafsir from the angle of *tafsīr bi-l-riwāyāt*. In Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view this is the standard hermeneutics of most of the previous scholars and therefore warrants particular consideration. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, grounded in the classical tradition but highly critical of the hadith specialists who uncritically imitate it, has a scrupulous approach to hadith in tafsir highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter Four discusses the complex relationship between philosophy and tafsir. This is perhaps the most misunderstood issue related to Ṭabāṭabā'ī's methodology and deserves special attention, since his tafsir is sometimes misidentified by supporters and critics alike as “philosophical”. While it is true that Ṭabāṭabā'ī was a vigorous supporter of Islamic, or more precisely “divine” philosophy, he was far from an uncritical one. He championed the use of intellect in general creedal matters, first and foremost the absolute oneness of God. Since he contends that the goal of the Qur'an is to elucidate the metaphysical “realities” which form the basis of those general creedal matters, Ṭabāṭabā'ī believes that the same “firm demonstrative proofs” which are the basis of divine philosophy must also play a primary role in proper tafsir.

Chapter Five looks at two issues closely related to divine philosophy but sufficiently significant in their own right to merit a separate chapter. The first issue is the detractors of divine philosophy and Ṭabāṭabā'ī's frequent critique of their crypto-materialistic hermeneutics. The recent trend of “scientific tafsirs” is discussed as a prime example of this style. Secondly, Ṭabāṭabā'ī's cautious approach towards mysticism and his hesitancy regarding its place in tafsir is examined. By way of illustration, the restraint of the author of *al-Mizān* is contrasted with the exuberance of 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī's *Ta'wilāt*.

Chapter Six presents the *āyāt al-ghurar*. These “preeminent” Qur'anic verses, generally related to divine unity, are a special contribution of the author of *al-Mizān* to the field of tafsir. They represent keys unlocking Ṭabāṭabā'ī's foundational hermeneutical principles. Examples are provided from *al-Mizān*, including the meaning

of one of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's most quoted *āyat al-ghurrah*, verse 21 of Sūrat al-Ḥijr, as well as the connotation of the *malakūt* and the “face of God”.

Chapter Seven concludes with some significant tafsir and tafsir-related developments following *al-Mīzān*. First, the major trend of thematic tafsir (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*), particularly as envisioned by the Iraqi scholar Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr (d. 1980), is viewed as the logical conclusion to Ṭabāṭabā'ī's meticulous hermeneutics. Like *al-Mīzān*, thematic tafsir posits the hermeneutical superiority of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, but goes a step further in the pursuit of this goal. As its name implies, thematic tafsir takes the exegetical focus away from the classical atomistic sequential format to an inclusive subject-based arrangement. Secondly, two important sequential tafsirs written after *al-Mīzān* are examined. The second part of the chapter looks in detail at two important intellectual successors of Ṭabāṭabā'ī and their writings as noteworthy but neglected resources for appreciating his unique hermeneutics. Mention is also made of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's scholarly stature and its significant role in reshaping and revitalizing the contemporary *ḥawzah* milieu.

The edition of *al-Mīzān* used in this dissertation was printed by Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-l Maṭbū'āt, Beirut, in 1418/1997. Besides the twenty original volumes this edition is accompanied by two additional ones: a topical index (*dalīl al-tafsīr*) originally written in Persian by Ilyās Kalāntarī and translated into Arabic by 'Abbās Tarjumān, and a detailed volume of miscellaneous indices (*al-fahāris al-'āmmah*) prepared by 'Adil 'Abd al-Jabbār Thāmir Shāṭ'ī. Because of its popularity among both *ḥawzah* scholars and educated Shī'ah, Ṭabāṭabā'ī's monumental tafsir has undergone numerous reissues. Therefore, slight differences in pagination may exist between the aforementioned printing

and other editions. This caveat also holds true for other foundational Islamic works referenced in this paper, such as the multivolume tafsir and hadith books.

The first six volumes of *al-Mizān*, until the end of Sūrat al-Mā'idah, have been translated into English by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi and published in twelve volumes by the World Organization of Islamic Services, Tehran. A random comparison between it and the original shows that it is closer to a paraphrase than a literal rendering. The translator took some modest liberties such as occasionally omitting short passages or loosely translating some technical language, without substantially altering its meaning. Considering the density and scope of the original Rizvi's translation is highly readable. However, while his translation is serviceable for a general audience, for the sake of a detailed analysis of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's tafsir methodology this dissertation attempts at a more literal style.

The Qur'an translation used in this dissertation is 'Alī Qūlī Qarā'ī's *The Qur'ān: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* published by ICAS Press, London in 2004. There are a few reasons this translation was preferred over others. First, the translator is one of the few researchers specializing in the Qur'anic studies, Shī'ī theology and philosophy taught in the *hawzah* and producing academic work in English. His interests and concerns reflect those of the contemporary *hawzah*, especially Ṭabāṭabā'ī's exegetical legacy. Secondly, although the English in the translation is smooth and elegant, and offers many resourceful renderings of difficult passages, it has received scant notice in Islamic studies.⁸ One innovative device employed by Qarā'ī is the use of italics for words in the second person singular which are addressed specifically to the Prophet.

⁸ Perhaps this is due to its recent publication as well as the flood of other new translations. For a review see Hamid Algar, "The Qur'ān with a Phrase-by-Phrase Translation," *Message of Thaḡalayn* 9 (1425/2004): 105-110.

However, for purposes of clarity occasional slight modifications have been made to his translation. The main instance of this modification is verse 21 of Sūrat al-Ḥijr, rendered by Qarā'ī as “There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure” where for reasons of clarification “sources” has been replaced by the more literal “treasures” and “known measure” is translated as “fixed measure”.

Finally, for ease of reference every citation of the Qur'an will be by the letter 'Q' followed by the number of *sūrah* and *āyāt*. Similarly, *al-Mizān* will be footnoted by the letter 'M' followed by the volume and page numbers. Thus, verse one of Sūrat al-Fātiḥah would be cited as Q 1:1 and page one of the first volume of *al-Mizān* would appear as M 1:1. Whenever “computer search of *al-Mizan*” is cited it refers to the third edition (1321/2001) of *al-Mu'jam*, a search engine of Islamic texts issued by al-Mu'jam al-Fiqhī Center of Qum.

Acknowledgments

First I would like to thank my chair Professor Hamid Algar for his continual support over the years. It has truly been a privilege to have been his student. I would also like to thank Professors Shahwali Ahmadi and Jeffrey Hadler for their generosity in evaluating a dense work in a short period of time. Many thanks also to Arun Rasiah, Cyrus Zargar, Sam Torabi, and David Salman, among others, for their continued support, suggestions and advice. Special thanks to my wife, Melissa Ordoñez, as well as my father, mother, and step-father for their help and patience. Of course, any errors are my own. *Wa mā tawfīqī illā bi-Allāh...*

Chapter One: 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī: Consummate Mujtahid

Formative Years in Tabriz and Najaf

Before embarking on a detailed discussion of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's Qur'anic methodology it would be useful to glance at the personal and educational background of the author to contextualize the intellectual and personal training which informed his outlook in the composition of *al-Mizān*. Born in Shāhdābād, a village near Tabriz, on Dhū-l Ḥijjah 29, 1321/March 17, 1904, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn was part of the Ṭabāṭabā'ī family, holding a distinguished lineage going back to the Prophet Muḥammad, as well as an illustrious intellectual heritage including 'ulamā' and shaykhs of Islam.¹ Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn and his brother Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥasan were orphaned at an early age and taken under the care of an uncle, who initiated their primary education.² In the beginning the future 'Allāmah was a reluctant and awkward student of the introductory level of traditional Islamic studies, called *muqaddimāt* in the Shī'ah seminaries (known as *hawzat 'ilmīyah* or simply *hawzah*) and comprising primarily of Arabic grammar and

¹ For autobiographical sketches, see 'Alī al-Awsī, *al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī wa Manhajuhu fī Tafsīrihi al-Mizān*. (Tehran, 1405, 1985), 36-43; and the collection of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's essays, *Barrasīhā-yi Islāmī*, ed. Sayyid Hādī Khusrawshāhī. (Qum: Dār al-Tablīgh-i Islāmī, 1396), 8-12. Detailed biographies include: Hamid Algar, "'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī: Philosopher, Exegete, and Gnostic," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17 (2006): 326-51; Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Tihirānī, *Mīhr-i Tābān*. (n.p. Intishārāt-i Bāqir al-'Ulūm, n.d.); Nāṣir Bāqirī Bīd-i Hindī, "Mufasssīr wa Hakīm-i Ilāhī Ḥazrat-i Āyat Allāh Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī," *Nūr-i 'Ilm* 3 (1989/1368 SH): 44-87.

² Little has been written about Ṭabāṭabā'ī's brother, reportedly a considerable scholar in his own right, but who passed away much earlier than the 'Allāmah and did not leave any written works. For an account of his personality and intellectual depth see Tihirānī, *Mīhr-i Tābān*. 23-5; and Ḥasan Ḥasanzādah Āmulī, "Matn-i Muṣāḥaba-yi Ustād 'Allāmah Ḥasan Ḥasanzādah Āmulī dar Mawrid-i 'Allāmah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī", n.p. n.d., 36-7. Ḥasanzādah Āmulī remarks that the two were equal in every respect, except Muḥammad Ḥusayn tended towards secrecy (*kutūm*) while Muḥammad Ḥasan was more open (*buzūl*), presumably in the discussion of gnostic matters.

traditional logic.³ According to his own account Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his youth experienced a bestowal of divine grace (*'ināyat ilāhīyah*) which facilitated all difficulties in his later studies: “If I encountered a problem, I would solve whatever problem I encountered, however much effort it cost me”.⁴ From failing his basic Arabic grammar test at the *muqaddimāt* level, Ṭabāṭabā'ī's mastery of Arabic language would develop to the point where many native speakers who read his Arabic works can hardly tell that it is not the author's native tongue. Ṭabāṭabā'ī advanced quickly through the intermediate level of seminary studies, called *suṭūh*, and in 1304/1925 he and his brother journeyed to Najaf in Iraq, then the preeminent *ḥawzah*.⁵ There has been a long tradition of aspiring seminary students from Iran taking residence in the shrine cities of Iraq (*'atabāt*) for extended periods of time to study the third and final level of *ḥawzah*, *dars al-khārij* (graduate studies). There the most well known scholars in *fiqh* expounded on the details of the fields of discursive positive law (*fiqh istidlālī*) and jurisprudential theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and certified that their most distinguished students reached the level of *ijtihād*, meaning they could independently derive the rulings of Shariah from its sources and potentially become *marāji' al-taqlīd*.⁶

Many events would have a decisive impact on the spiritual and intellectual development of Ṭabāṭabā'ī during his stay in Najaf. Firstly he attended the *khārij* classes

³ Algar (2006), 327.

⁴ *Ibid*, 328.

⁵ *Bīd-i Hindī* (1989/1368 SH), 37. For an anecdotal account of the life of a *ḥawzah* student (*tālib*) during Ṭabāṭabā'ī's time in Qum, see Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985). In these pages “(the) *ḥawzah*” refers to the collective system of Shi'ah seminaries which since Ṭabāṭabā'ī's time have been located in Qum in Iran and Najaf in Iraq. In past centuries Karbala and Hillah in Iraq and Isfahan in Iran have also been important seminary centers.

⁶ *fiqh istidlālī* deals with the arguments and opinions of the *fuqahā'* concerning rulings on particular issues (e.g. salat, hajj, zakat), while *uṣūl al-fiqh* discusses the general principles shared amongst these various particular issues (e.g. is the trustworthy report of a single narrator a proof) as well as relevant linguistic issues (called *fiqh al-lughah*). Mastery of both fields is a prerequisite for *ijtihād* in *fiqh*.

of the highest legal authorities of the time, Mirzā Ḥusayn Nā'inī, Abu-l-Ḥasan Iṣfahānī, and especially the philosopher-jurist, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Kumpānī. Ṭabāṭabā'ī received *ijāzah* in hadith from one of the most prestigious *muḥaddithīn* of contemporary times, 'Abbās Qummī, compiler of the most popular collection of devotional literature amongst the Shī'ah today, *Mafātīh al-Jinān*.⁷ Although Ṭabāṭabā'ī was certified as a mujtahid by Nā'inī he never pursued his specialization in *fiqh*, instead he focused on the other important *ḥawzah* field, the rational disciplines (*'ulūm 'aqliyah*), particularly philosophy.⁸ There are probably several reasons why Ṭabāṭabā'ī chose to specialize in philosophy instead of the more prevalent field of jurisprudence. These include his own personal temperament, the fact that there was already an abundance of legal specialists in the seminaries, and as Ṭabāṭabā'ī would later say himself, there was an urgent need for more teaching of the rational sciences especially Islamic theology and doctrine in the *ḥawzah* to defend against the intellectual attacks coming at the time from the Marxists and other materialists. In the eyes of Ṭabāṭabā'ī philosophy is a crucial prerequisite for a correct study of theology since the time of the prominent philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), who developed Shī'ī *kalām* and maintained strong ties with logic and philosophy, the main rational disciplines taught in the seminaries.⁹

Secondly Ṭabāṭabā'ī studied Islamic philosophy with Sayyid Ḥusayn Bādkūba'ī (d.1385/1939) for six years. Under his tutelage Ṭabāṭabā'ī read the basic texts of

⁷ al-Awsī, *al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, 43.

⁸ The only known legal work Ṭabāṭabā'ī left behind are scholia (*ta'liqāt*) on the most advanced text of *uṣūl al-fiqh* studied in the *ḥawzah*, the *Kifāyat al-Uṣūl* of Akhund Khurasānī. Bīd-i Hindī (1989/1368 SH), 70.

⁹ For a brief yet insightful discussion of how Avicennan philosophy became integrated into mainstream Shī'ī thought, see Ahmed H. al-Rahim, "The Twelver-Šī'ī Reception of Avicenna in the Mongol Period," in *Before and After Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group*. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 219-31.

philosophy, such as the *al-Shifā* 'of Ibn Sīnā, and *Sharḥ al-Manzūmah* of Hādī Sabzawārī. On the whole Ṭabāṭabā'ī followed the school of “transcendent philosophy” (*ḥikmat muta'ālīyah*)¹⁰ expounded by arguably the most significant post-Avicennan Islamic philosopher, Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Shirāzī, known as Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn or Mullā Ṣadrā (979/1571-72-1050/1640-41). Although the 'Allāmah considered Ibn Sīnā superior in his ability in argumentation, Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn's philosophical principles were overall “closest to the truth” in his view, especially the Shirazi sage's efforts to demonstrate the harmony between philosophy, mysticism and religion.¹¹ *Ḥikmah* is a synthesis of previous schools of Islamic philosophy, especially the Peripataetic (*mashshā'ī*) philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, as well as some principles derived from the Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) school of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī “Maqtūl” (d.587/1191). It also draws heavily from the theoretical mysticism (*al-'irfān al-nazarī*) established by Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his students, although that school also has its own separate history and adherents amongst the Shī'ah. The guiding principle of this school of philosophy is the primacy (*aṣālah*) and graded unity (*waḥdat tashkīkī*) of being (*wujūd*), which emphasizes the existential and unified nature of being over its outward forms and apparent multiplicity. Other key rules of *ḥikmah* include “trans-substantial motion” (*ḥarakat jawharīyah*) and “the unity of knower, known and knowledge” (*ittiḥād*

¹⁰ *ḥikmat muta'ālīyah* has been variously translated as transcendent wisdom, mystical philosophy or theosophy. Evidently Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī first used the term to describe discursive reasoning which has been verified by intuition and spiritual unveilings. Sajjad Rizvi, “Mysticism and Philosophy: Ibn 'Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 244 footnote 39. Mullā Ṣadrā and Ṭabāṭabā'ī also calls this harmonization of mysticism, philosophy, and revelation *ḥikmat* (or *falsafat*) *ilāhīyah*. In this paper it will be referred to as *ḥikmah* or simply Sadrian philosophy.

¹¹ Tihirānī, *Mihr-i Tābān*, 27.

al-‘ālim wa-l-ma‘lūm wa-l-‘ilm).¹²

Probably the most far-reaching influence on Ṭabāṭabā’ī in his ten years in Najaf was a cousin, Mīrzā ‘Alī Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1286/1869-1365/1947), commonly known as ‘Allāmah Qāḍī. Although Ṭabāṭabā’ī was reticent to discuss much about his spiritual or even intellectual encounters with ‘Allāmah Qāḍī he did remark on more than one occasion: “everything we have is from Qāḍī.”¹³ As a sign of the respect with which he held this teacher, when Ṭabāṭabā’ī first moved to Qum in the 1950s although he was referred to by as students as Qāḍī (one of the Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s ancestors was the *qāḍī al-quḍāt* of Azerbaijan), he insisted upon the use of his *nisbah* instead. Of all his teacher, Qāḍī was the only one who called “the master” (*ustād*) without the usual mention of name or *alqāb*.¹⁴ After Qāḍī passed away one of Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s students relates that he refused to use any perfume for the rest of his days. Like Ṭabāṭabā’ī, ‘Allāmah Qāḍī was highly skilled in *fiqh*, and his father was a prominent student of the *marja’ al-taqlīd* Mīrzā Ḥasan Shirāzī, yet he eschewed any teaching positions in that area. Instead, like Ṭabāṭabā’ī later on in Qum, Qāḍī focused on teaching Islamic doctrines (*ma‘ārif*) and spiritual wayfaring (*sayr wa sulūk*). Qāḍī taught Ṭabāṭabā’ī key texts of theoretical ‘*irfān*, such as *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, and also guided him on personal spiritual disciplines, such as night vigils and special *dhikrs*.

Most importantly, there is a report from Ṭabāṭabā’ī that his tafsir methodology is heavily indebted to Qāḍī. Ṭabāṭabā’ī mentioned that Qāḍī delivered tafsir lectures in

¹² Useful overviews of Ṣadrian philosophy include: Zailan Moris, *Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason in the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra: An Analysis of the al-Hikmah al-'Arshiyah*. (New York: Routledge, 2003); James Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); and Jalāl al-Dīn Astiyānī, *Sharḥ-i Ḥāl va Ārā-yi Falsafī-yi Mullā Ṣadrā*. (Qum: Intishārāt-i Daftar-i Tablīghāt-i Ḥawza-yi ‘Ilmiya-yi Qum, 1378 SH).

¹³ Tīhrānī, *Mīhr-i Tābān*, 16; Ṣādiq Ḥasanzādah, *Uswat al-'Urafā'*. (Qum: Maktabat Āl ‘Alī, 1424), 38, 59.

¹⁴ Tīhrānī, *Mīhr-i Tābān*, 14.

Najaf but in a special style, tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. On more than one occasion Ṭabāṭabā'ī said: "we have learned this style (*subuk*) of elucidating one ayah by another from the late Qāḍī; we follow his path (*masīr-o mamshā*) in tafsir."¹⁵ The methodology which Ṭabāṭabā'ī is referring to is the hallmark one which he developed in *al-Mizān* about twenty years later, which relies heavily on the Qur'an as its own interpreter using the authentic Sunnah and sound reason as guides, not as the focus, for explaining the *zāhir al-āyāt*. Unfortunately without Qāḍī's lectures available it is difficult to specifically say in what ways Ṭabāṭabā'ī's tafsir style was derived from Qāḍī's. There are also indications of the influence of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's other teachers on his emphasis on rational arguments as well as close attention to creedal and ethical matters in *al-Mizān*. For example, in one important doctrinal discussion Ṭabāṭabā'ī recalls a rational argument for the necessity of the infallibility (*'iṣmah*) of the divinely appointed Imam taught by one of his teachers (*baḍ asātidhātina raḥmat Allāh 'alayh*).¹⁶ Ṭabāṭabā'ī later mentioned to a student that this teacher was Ayatullah Badkūbā'ī, his main instructor in philosophy.¹⁷

After a decade of study in Najaf, due to financial constraints Ṭabāṭabā'ī and his brother were forced to return to their native Tabriz. There, according to his own account, Ṭabāṭabā'ī spent another ten difficult years focused more on maintaining his mundane affairs than on study or teaching. This time in Tabriz was not without intellectual fruit, however, for Ṭabāṭabā'ī wrote a number of small treatises on philosophical and doctrinal

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

¹⁶ M 1:270.

¹⁷ Ḥasanzadāh Āmulī, "Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī dar Manẓara-yi 'Irfān-i Naẓarī wa 'Amalī," *Kayhān-i Andīsha* 26 (1368 SH): 2-12, 9. The argument is also found in a similar form in Nūr Allāh Shustarī's polemical classic *Iḥqāq al-Ḥaqq wa Izhāq al-Bāṭil*. Edited by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī. 19 vols. (Qum: Maktabat Āyat Allāh al-'Uzma al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī, 1404), 2:367-9.

issues, some of which were collected posthumously as *al-Rasā'il al-Tawhīdīyah*. This work consists of seven treatises, four regarding issues of Divine unity (*tawhīd*) in its broadest sense, i.e. the Divine Essence, names, acts, and intermediaries, and three essays regarding the spiritual journey of man before this world, in this world, and after this world. In these essays we have a blueprint for Ṭabāṭabā'ī's approach to Islamic doctrines, especially regarding the important metaphysical question of the origin and return of creation from God to God (*mabda' wa ma'ād*) which he would frequently take up in *al-Mizān*.¹⁸ In the essays of *al-Rasā'il al-Tawhīdīyah*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī addresses key theological issues but in the philosophical style which he later sought to revive in the *hawzah* of Qum, a renewed *kalām*. While the specifics of this style will be discussed later, it could briefly be characterized by a strong reliance on the main rational principles of Sadrian philosophy as well as the twin textual pillars of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunnah, but with the key addition of a properly formulated exegesis of those texts, namely tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, and what Ṭabāṭabā'ī called *fiqh al-hadīth*.

Like his tafsir methodology, Ṭabāṭabā'ī attributed this last style to his spiritual guide 'Allāmah Qādī. Examples of what Ṭabāṭabā'ī meant by *fiqh al-hadīth* can be gleaned from the sections of *al-Mizān* which deal with the ahadith related to the *āyāt* of each section accompanied by the author's comments on these hadith. Apparently *fiqh al-hadīth* refers to the deep understanding of the hadith related to creedal and ethical matters obtained by comparing related verses and hadith as well as the use of reason and spiritual insight. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hadith methodology is a key component of his tafsir methodology and will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four.

¹⁸ *al-Rasā'il al-Tawhīdīyah* will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Transition to the *Ḥawzah* of Qum

After about a decade of what Ṭabāṭabā'ī characterized as “spiritual loss” in his native town, the upheaval of World War II provided an opportunity for change. A Soviet backed regime occupied Azerbaijan and took Ṭabāṭabā'ī's farm lands, forcing him to leave in 1946.¹⁹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī chose to reside in the main seminary city in Iran, Qum, and pursue his main interest, the instruction of Sadrian philosophy. While Qum was one of the earliest Shī'ī cities in Iran, throughout most of its history its religious institutions were overshadowed by those of Najaf, Karbala and Hillah in Iraq or Isfahan in Iran. In 1922 one of the *marja' al-taqlīd*, 'Abd al-Karīm Ḥā'irī (d. 1937), came from Arak to Qum with the purpose of reviving its *ḥawzah*, and despite the anti-religious policies of Reza Khan Pahlavi, by the 1950's Qum's *ḥawzah* had grown considerably in both size and prestige, presided over by the leading *marja' al-taqlīd* of Iran at the time, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Burūjirdī (d.1962). Ṭabāṭabā'ī probably had little idea when he came to Qum that his teaching and writing there would be a substantial factor in the revival of the *ḥawzah*, and more generally the intellectual climate of Shī'ī scholarship. This process was not without its various obstacles, however. By his own testimony when he arrived there the intellectual climate had much to be desired, especially in terms of the teaching of the disciplines of tafsir and philosophy.

When I came to Qum, I studied the educational program at the *ḥawzah* and I measured it with the needs of the Islamic society. I found deficiencies in it, and I felt it was my duty to try and eradicate them. The most important deficiencies in

¹⁹ Algar (2006), 332. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's brother, also a specialist in philosophy, somehow continued to live and teach in Tabriz, but passed away a few years after his brother's departure to Qum.

the *hawzah* program were in the area of Qur'anic exegesis and intellectual sciences. As a result I began to study tafsir and philosophy. Despite the fact that at the time tafsir of the Qur'an, which is a science that requires research and scrutiny, was not being addressed, it was not considered worthy of study by those who had the ability to do research in the fields of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl*). Rather teaching tafsir was considered a sign of having weaker qualifications. However I knew I could not use this as an excuse in front of God [so as not to study tafsir] and I continued my studies until I completed the writing of *Tafsīr al-Mizān*.²⁰

After Ṭabāṭabā'ī arrived in Qum he started a small class in philosophy which due to the reputation of his erudition and congenial personality started with a hundred students on the first day.²¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī's public teaching of philosophy, a subject looked upon skeptically by some of the legal scholars, caused a brief crisis with the *hawzah* establishment. Ayatullah Burūjirdī stopped giving the monthly stipend to those students who took the Allāmah's class and wrote a letter asking him to cease teaching Mullā Ṣadrā's *al-Asfār al-Arba'a*. It is noteworthy that Burūjirdī's reason for asking Ṭabāṭabā'ī to stop teaching was not the heretical nature of philosophy *per se* but rather its public dissemination. He remarked in the letter that he himself had studied the *Asfār* as a student in Isfahan but with a private tutor. His chief concern was that the subtle and abstract ideas of philosophy might inadvertently corrupt the religious students. The 'Allāmah's reply is also revealing in that in it he enunciates his motives for coming to

²⁰ Aḥmad Luqmānī, *'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī: Mizān-i Ma'rifat*. (Tehran: Markāz-i Chāp va Nashr-i Bayn al-Milal, 1380 SH), 36-7. This book has been partially translated by S.K. Yusufali. *Eternal Manifestation: 80 Stories from the Life of 'Allama Tabataba'i (ra)*. <<http://al-islam.org/eternalmanifestations/>>.

²¹ Tihrānī, *Mihr-i Tābān*, 9.

Qum. Along with the above-mentioned personal testimonial, it should be called a manifesto of his teaching and writing career in Qum, foremost of which are his philosophical-theological works and *al-Mizān*. “I have studied the well-known and official disciplines like *fiqh* [*istidlālī*] and *uṣūl* [*al-fiqh*] and I can take on their teaching...but I have only, *and only*, come from Tabriz to Qum in order to put the beliefs (‘*aqā’id*) of the *ḥawzah* students on a correct foundation so they can face the false beliefs of the materialists and others.” Ṭabāṭabā’ī then comments that at the time when Burūjirdī was privately studying the *Asfār* the beliefs of the students were not as ideologically tainted as they were during his day. Therefore it was now incumbent on the teachers of the *ḥawzah* to train their students to confront the materialists with the aid of authentic Islamic philosophy and theology. He ends his letter by noting, “...at the same time I consider Ayatullah Burūjirdī the legitimate jurisprudent authority (*ḥākim shar’ī*) and if he gives an order (*ḥukm*) for me to abandon teaching the *Asfār*, then the case would be different.”²² What is noteworthy is Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s emphasis on opposing the materialists in all their various forms, whether Marxist or otherwise, through Islamic philosophy and theology. The materialists, in the ‘Allāmah’s view, would not only cover atheists but also Muslims who limit the bounds of intelligible existence to physical matter or fail to grasp the ontological vastness of the higher levels of existence called *ghayb* in the Qur’an. Ṭabāṭabā’ī frequently critiques their views in *al-Mizān*, even those Muslim writers who perhaps unwittingly take from their ideas by, for example, denying or explaining away miracles or failing to grasp the existential dimensions of the Divine acts. Also noteworthy is Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s deference to Burūjirdī’s status as the legitimate

²² Algar (2006), 334-5.

jurisprudent authority, meaning that as a prominent mujtahid and *marja' al-taqlid* Būrujirdī had not only the authority to issue decrees concerning the general Islamic positive laws (*fatāwā*) but also to issue a particular order to prevent Ṭabāṭabā'ī from teaching philosophy. Būrujirdī, however, refrained from pursuing the matter further, and even developed congenial relations with Ṭabāṭabā'ī.²³

Later in his stay in Qum the 'Allāmah would confront other difficulties from skeptics of philosophy. In the early 1950s a new edition of one of the important collections of Shī'ī traditions, *Bihār al-Anwār*, compiled and commented on by the Safavid-era *muhaddith* Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d 1110/1699), was published in Tehran with footnotes from various scholars, including Ṭabāṭabā'ī.²⁴ Some of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's notes for the first volume (fittingly "on intellect and ignorance") proved controversial with those opposed to his rational approach to belief-related hadith, and his critique of Majlisī's non-rational interpretations of such hadith. At the end of one chapter²⁵ Majlisī offers a number of opinions concerning the quiddity of the intellect (*māhīyat al-'aql*), in which he critiques the opinion of the philosophers that the intellect is an 'immaterial substance possessing ontological priority' (*jawhar mujarrad qadīm*).²⁶ Rather Majlisī opines that the intellect is the rational faculty which distinguishes between good and evil or the psychological trait which calls to choosing what is beneficial over what is detrimental. Ṭabāṭabā'ī finds this explanation unsatisfactory on a number of

²³ Tihrānī, *Mihr-i Tābān*, 61-2. Ṭabāṭabā'ī mentions in his autographical sketch (al-Awsī, *Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, 43) that Būrujirdī also gave him an *ijāzah* to relate hadith; this is a typical way in *hawzah* to show respect between scholars. A famous example of a *hukm* is Mīrzā Ḥasan Shirāzī's order for the boycott of tobacco during the Qajar period.

²⁴ Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār al-Jām'iat li-Durar al-Akhhār al-A'immat al-Aṭhār*. 110 vols. (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub, 1956-1978).

²⁵ *Ibid*, 1:96-105.

levels and writes two footnotes strongly critiquing Majlisī's approach. Ṭabāṭabā'ī writes that Majlisī has conflated the various spiritual levels of the concept and has made the mistake of reading all the various hadith on this issue on one level, while the infallible Imams addressed their followers according to their various capacities. Furthermore, to say that philosophical arguments have no bearing on hadith is like saying hadith has no bearing on Qur'an. A sound rational argument (*burhān*) cannot be summarily rejected because one dislikes the style of the philosophers or finds their terminology peculiar or superfluous (*fuḍūl*, in Majlisī's words). For Ṭabāṭabā'ī one of the main errors of the Akhbārīs is their reliance on the apparent meanings (*ẓuhūr al-lafẓ*) of solitary hadith (*akhbār aḥād*) without first referring to sound rational arguments (*muqaddimāt burhānīyah*) since the former are conjectural (*ẓannī*) in their probative force (*ḥujjatīyah*) while the latter are certain. The 'Allāmah then offers some strongly worded advice to those who are "not grounded in deep rational discussions" to take the "path of precaution" and "hold to the external [aspects] of Qur'an and the widely-narrated hadith and leave the knowledge of their inner realities to Allah and avoid entering deep rational discussions, neither affirming nor denying."²⁷ Such an attitude did not sit well with the editors of the *Biḥār* and they asked him to revise his comments. Ṭabāṭabā'ī refused, commenting that it is more important to defend the sayings of the Infallibles over the personal opinions of 'Allāmah Majlisī, and Ṭabāṭabā'ī's notes ceased with the seventh volume.²⁸ Ṭabāṭabā'ī did contribute some brief footnotes to another fundamental text of hadith, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, adding some in-depth discussions of *badā'*, the specifically Shi'ī

²⁷ *Ibid.* 1:104.

²⁸ One writer enumerates about seventy footnotes in all. Sayyid Ibrāhīm Sayyid 'Alawī. "Mitud-i Naqd wa Tahqīq-i Ḥadīth az Nazar-i 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī," *Kayhān-i Andīsha*: 26: 21-39, 22. Despite his strong critique of Majlisī in philosophical matters, Tabataba'ī still professed great admiration for him as a scholar, particularly of hadith. Tihirānī, *Mīhr-i Tābān*, 35-6.

doctrine related to the appearance of change in the Divine will.

After teaching the *Asfār* in the early 1950s Ṭabāṭabā'ī embarked on a comparative study of Western and Islamic philosophy. According to different reports the immediate reason for teaching comparative philosophy was either a request from one of his close students, 'Izz al-Dīn Zanjānī, or the publication of a book taking the materialist stance that all religions are “guardians of magic and stupefaction.”²⁹ The notes of these lectures were edited and commented on by one of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's most prominent students, Ayatullah Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (d. 1399/1979), and published in a number of volumes as *Uṣūl-i Falsafah wa Rivīsh-i Ri'ālīzm*. Although ostensibly his goal was to refute the idealism of the Marxists, who were active in Middle East politics at the time, Ṭabāṭabā'ī's more general plan in this and other works of his Qum period, as he stated in his letter to Ayatullah Burūjirdī, was primarily to critique the materialist opposition to metaphysics, rather than confront any of its specific social or political manifestations. As the title of this work indicates, Ṭabāṭabā'ī's premise was that Islamic philosophy is realistic in the literal sense of the word in that it affirms that the scope of external reality is more expansive than matter. The immediate issues dealt with in *Uṣūl-i Falsafah* are related to defending the Islamic philosophical view on epistemology, ontology and causation, particularly from the point of view of *ḥikmah*. While the 'Allāmah was aware of contemporary political, social, and economic issues, as his various articles and essays in *al-Mīzān* and elsewhere testify,³⁰ he was first and foremost a philosopher and theologian, and his chief concern was to defend and promote Islamic doctrines against atheism and the irreligious philosophies of the West, whether Marxism, positivism, or

²⁹ Algar (2006), 337-8.

³⁰ A number of social and political treatises of his are found in *Barrasīhā-yi Islāmī*.

even Muslim crypto-materialist readings of Qur'an and Sunnah, as will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's main work completed in Qum was the twenty-volume exegesis *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* started around 1374/1954 and completed on the most important night of the Islamic calendar, "the night of ordainment" (*laylat al-qadr*), Ramadan 23, 1392/October 31, 1972.³¹ In Tabriz Ṭabāṭabā'ī had also given tafsir classes up to *sūrat al-A'rāf* to a handful of students.³² In Qum Ṭabāṭabā'ī also gave tafsir classes and at the request of his students wrote them into the volumes which become *al-Mizān*. According to one account from the 'Allāmah, one of the motivating factors for starting *al-Mizān* was his research of *Biḥar al-Anwār* and his resulting desire to collect together similar *āyāt* and *riwāyāt*.³³ As was seen in his letter to Burūjirdī and his testimonial on entering Qum, Ṭabāṭabā'ī saw his main task as reviving philosophy in the *ḥawzah* and intellectually confronting the materialists by developing a firmly grounded tafsir, dealing with crucial philosophical, theological and social issues. *Al-Mizān* can definitely be read as a critical part of this project, in that it is in many ways a philosophical-theological encyclopedia of Islamic doctrines.³⁴

In terms of format, the majority of *al-Mizān* is dedicated to the "exposition"

³¹ The approximate starting date is given by Tihriānī, *Mihr-i Tābān*, 31 and the completion date is provided by the author in M 20:461.

³² These early tafsir lectures have recently been published under the title *Tafsīr al-Bayān fī-l-Muwāfaqat bayn al-Ḥadīth wa-l-Qur'ān*. 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf li-l-Maṭbū'āt, 2006). The work ends rather abruptly at Q 12:56. Overall, this tafsir appears like notes or a rough draft for *al-Mizān*. Unlike his completed tafsir, many verses in *al-Bayān* lack accompanying commentary, and the hadith, all from Shī'ī sources, are added without comment with the commentary of each verse. There are also no separate philosophical, historical, or sociological discussions.

³³ Luqmānī, *Mizān-i Ma'rifat*, 42. Yusufali, *Eternal Manifestations*, <<http://al-islam.org/eternalmanifestations/>>.

³⁴ In the words of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's foremost student in tafsir, Ayatullah Jawādī Āmulī. Algar (2006), 339. Another prominent contemporary Shī'ī theologian and student of Jawādī Āmulī, Ayatullah Kamāl Ḥaydarī, has expressed this idea in more detail in a discussion published as Jawād 'Alī Kassār, *al-Manhaj al-'Aqā'idī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān: Ḥiwār ma'a al-Sayyid Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī*. (n.p, Dār Farāqid, 1424), which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

section (*bayān*) and the proper interpretation of the Qur’anic verses by “letting the Book speak for itself”. At the beginning of each *sūrah* the ‘Allāmah gives a brief overview, running from a paragraph to a few pages, of what he identifies as its overarching objective (*gharaḍ*). Next he starts the *bayān* section by taking a group of related verses and commenting on that groups overall main theme, followed by a verse by verse commentary of their apparent meanings. The exegesis of each verse is frequently prefaced with a small amount of linguistic and grammatical analysis, in so far as these details affect the general meanings of the verse. Rarely in the exposition does he quote hadith, and then in an only summary fashion (without *isnād* and source) and generally only if he considers them of certain provenance (*mutawātur* or *qaṭ’ī al-ṣudūr*). If the verse has been particularly controversial amongst the *mufasssirin*, after offering the explanation he argues is closest to the apparent meaning Ṭabāṭabā’ī mentions the most significant divergent opinions, critiquing each one in turn and usually concluding that they are either far (*ba’īd*) removed from the meaning of the verse or possible but not as preferable (*awlā*) as the conclusion he has reached. After finishing the *bayān* discussion on a group of interconnected *āyāt*, the ‘Allāmah usually offers one, or rarely two, narrative sections (*baḥth riwā’ī*), presenting the relevant hadith from both Sunni and Shī’ī sources with occasional remarks. At times, supplementary discussions on pertinent philosophical, historical, academic and sociological issues are offered following the narrative section. Since Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s tafsir methodology and his emphasis on the philosophical-theological aspects of the Qur’anic message is the topic of this dissertation, the content of *al-Mizān* will be analyzed in the forthcoming chapters.

Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s final contribution to his goal of reviving philosophy in the *hawzah*

was a two-volume textbook for students, *Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah* and *Nihāyat al-Ḥikmah*. Before these two works a seminary student of philosophy would start with Hādī Sabzawārī's *Sharḥ al-Manzūmah*, a dense poetic presentation of the main principles of Sadrian philosophy more suited for the intermediate than novice student. At the request of the faculty of the then newly formed Madrasat Muntashariyah (later renamed Madrasat Haqqānī, then Madrasat Shahīdayn) to write an introductory textbook in philosophy, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, with the assistance of his student Jawādī Āmulī, published the first volume in 1390/1970 and the second five years later.³⁵ These two texts are now required for beginning and intermediate students of philosophy in *hawzah*.

Besides the above-mentioned specialist works Ṭabāṭabā'ī also authored a number of essays and short works intended for an audience broader than the teachers and students of the *hawzah*. In the mid-1960's at the invitation of an American professor Ṭabāṭabā'ī wrote three general works later translated into English. These three, *Shiah in Islam, A Shiite Anthology*, and *The Qur'an in Islam*, were the first widely available works in English describing Shī'ī beliefs and history from a Shī'ī point of view, and also established Ṭabāṭabā'ī's reputation in the West as an eminent Muslim scholar. Later a fourth book providing a survey of Islamic belief and practice, *Islamic Teachings: An Overview*, was also translated into English. The 'Allāmah also had frequent meetings with the famous French Orientalist Henry Corbin (d. 1978) in which they would discuss sundry questions related to the history of Shī'ism and comparative religion. Some of these discussions were published as *Shī'ah: Majūm 'a-yi Mudhākharāt bā Profisūr Hānrī Kurban*.

³⁵Muhammad Legenhausen, introduction to 'Alī Qūlī Qarā'ī, *Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*. (London: ICAS Press, 2003), xi. This is an English translation of *Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah*.

Gnosticism and Ethical Training

Although much has been said concerning Ṭabāṭabā'ī's emphasis on reasoning and logic in religion, it should not be imagined that he neglected other approaches to religious doctrine or regarded the intellect as sufficient to find absolute certainty of the metaphysical realities. In fact, in many of his writings and lectures, including *al-Mizān*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī's repeatedly discusses purification of the self (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and cultivation of virtues (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*) as a way of opening the heart, the organ of inner perception in Islamic thought. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's emphasis on the practical aspects of religious life can perhaps be mainly attributed to 'Allāmah Qāḍī, as he mentions that one of his first encounters in Najaf with Qāḍī ended with him advising the young student "to think about purifying and perfecting the soul, and not neglect the self, in addition to pursuing knowledge," words which had a powerful effect on him.³⁶ One of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's students stated that he once said "we have no task except self-restraint." Despite repeated requests from his students, however, Ṭabāṭabā'ī did not teach the standard *ḥawzah* text in practical ethics, 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī's commentary on 'Abd Allāh Anṣārī's *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn*, instead he chose the shorter and more concise treatise on spiritual wayfaring attributed to a well-known Qajar period 'ārif, faqīh, and distant relative, Mahdī "Baḥr al-'Ulūm" Ṭabāṭabā'ī.³⁷ In these lectures the 'Allāmah explains that the best way to know God is knowledge of the self, and that this is the path of his spiritual mentor 'Allāmah

³⁶ Hasanzādah, *Uswat al-'Urafā'*, 45.

³⁷ Posthumously published by Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī Tihrānī, "Lubb al-Albāb dar Sayr-o-Sulūk-i ūlī-l-Albāb," *Yadnāma-yi Ūstād-i Shahīd Murtaḍā Muṭahharī*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm Surūsh. (Tehran, 1360 SH/1981), 193-255, and translated into English by Mohammed H. Faghfoory as *Kernel of the Kernel: Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of the Intellect*. (New York: SUNY Press, 2003).

Qādī. In one independent discussion in *al-Mizān*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī dedicates sixteen pages to the issue of self-knowledge ('*irfān al-nafs*), which was apparently as crucial to him as the need for reviving rational disciplines in the *ḥawzah*. Also noteworthy is that Ṭabāṭabā'ī also politely refused requests to teach the classic texts of theoretical mysticism, such as Dāwūd Qayṣarī's *Muqaddimat Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, instead encouraging his students to focus on tafsir and self-purification.³⁸ He highly recommended Raḍī al-Dīn ibn Ṭāwūs' compilation of the supplications of the Infallibles, *Iqbāl al-A'māl*, and Aḥmad Narāqī's manual on ethics, *Jāmi' al-Sa'ādāt*. Perhaps this was an implicit acknowledgement by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, similar to Burūjirdī's reservations over the public teaching of philosophy, of the risks involved in the open teaching of mysticism, a topic known for its subjective viewpoints and ecstatic language, which in the opinion of some experts is only appropriate for the initiated.³⁹ Due to health problems Ṭabāṭabā'ī's public teaching and scholarly meetings substantially decreased from the mid-1970s. After returning one year from his annual summer journey to the pilgrimage city of Mashhad the 'Allāmah became sick beyond recovery and spent his remaining days in seclusion in his modest Qum home, receiving only close associates. He passed away on the morning of Muḥarram 18, 1402/November 7, 1981 and was buried next to his close student, Murtaḍā Muṭaḥharī, in the shrine complex of Fāṭimah al-Ma'ṣūmah.

³⁸ In the *ḥawzah* ethics and mysticism (*akhlāq* and '*irfān*') are viewed as overlapping topics since both rely upon gnosis (*ma'rifaḥ*) of God and the self. Practical ('*amali*') ethics and mysticism focuses on the practical disciplines and spiritual wayfaring required to cultivate virtues and eschew vices. Theoretical (*naẓarī*) ethics and mysticism primarily discusses aspects of God's attributes and names and their diverse relationships with the attributes of creation in general and the human soul in particular. There are definite commonalities, as well as some significant differences, between '*irfān*' and *taṣawwuf*, the mystical tradition as it is known amongst Sunnis, although for its Shī'ī proponents '*irfān*' is not mere imitation of the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi and his students but is deeply rooted in revealed texts and sound intellect.

³⁹ For example Jawādī Āmulī has said that the best books of practical '*irfān*' are the treatise of practical laws (*risāla-yi 'amaliyah*) and *Mifātiḥ al-Jinān*. Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī, "Ḥiwār fi-l-Tawḥīd", lecture 8. <<http://www.alhaideri.net>>.

Perhaps as important as Ṭabāṭabā'ī's written output⁴⁰ is the legacy he left behind through his many students, a number of whom become eminent *hawzah* teachers (*ustād*) in their own right.⁴¹ Besides Murtaḍā Muṭahharī and Jawādī Āmulī mention could be made of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī Tīhrānī (d. 1995), Muḥammad Misbāḥ Yazdī and Ḥasan Ḥasanzadah Āmulī. These disciples of the 'Allāmah are continuing his efforts to revive and reform the non-*fiqh* fields of the *hawzah*, particularly *kalām*, philosophy and exegesis, and have in turn taught other students instructing what might loosely be called the Ṭabāṭabā'ī school of exegesis.

When asked to describe the 'Allāmah, Ḥasanzadah Āmulī replied that his teacher was a mujtahid in the two foundational fields of *hawzah*, the intellectual and transmitted sciences (*dar 'ulūm-i 'aqlī wa naqlī mujtahid būd*).⁴² These two areas cover the fields of traditional philosophy and theology as well as *fiqh* and hadith, and it is rare in *hawzah* to find a scholar who firmly possesses these "two wings." Tīhrānī described Ṭabāṭabā'ī as an *ustād* of intellect, revelation, and the heart.⁴³ It is hoped that the following pages will illustrate how this consummate mujtahid made a monumental contribution to *ijtihad* in *tafsir* and its foundational principles.

⁴⁰ For an extensive bibliography of works by and about Ṭabāṭabā'ī in Arabic and Persian see Qanbar 'Alī Kirmānī, *Kitābshināsī-yi 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī*. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Danishgāh-yi 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1383 SH).

⁴¹ For a listing of sixty-seven prominent students see *Bīd-i Hindī* (1989/1368 SH), 81-2.

⁴² Ḥasanzadah Āmulī, "Matn-i Muṣaḥābah", 22.

⁴³ Tīhrānī, *Mīhr-i Tābān*, 306.

Chapter Two: Finding the Balance in Qur'anic Hermeneutics

True Tafsir as *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*

In the key introduction (*muqaddimat al-kitāb*) to *al-Mizān*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī lays out his vision of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an and, in his typically logical fashion, argues against all alternative hermeneutics. Given the length of *al-Mizān* the introduction is remarkably brief, about ten pages, although a carefully reading of it in conjunction with two other discussions,¹ reveals his conception of true tafsir (*ḥaqq al-tafsīr*) and the methodology of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*.

In Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hermeneutical vision, the goal of tafsir is none other than the elucidation (*bayān*) of the general meanings of the Qur'anic verses. Ṭabāṭabā'ī immediately refers to this idea in the first sentence of the prologue, a succinct definition of tafsir as “explaining the meanings of the Qur'anic verses and uncovering their import and significance” (*bayān ma'ānī al-āyāt al-Qur'āniyah wa-l-kashf 'an maqāsidihā wa madālilihā*).² The 'Allāmah objects to any hermeneutic where the voice of the interpreter overwhelms “the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic verses” (*ẓāhir al-āyāt*).³ In a tafsir, if issues other than those related to the explanation of the *ẓāhir al-āyāt* take priority, the result will not be valid. Demonstrating how historically this has been the case, in the prologue Ṭabāṭabā'ī glances at the course of tafsir from the time of the

¹ In Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Qur'ān dar Islām*. (Mashhad: Intishārāt-i Ṭulū', n.d.), and M 3:87-101. Both of these discussions will be examined in this chapter.

² M 1:7.

³ The concept of *ẓāhir* is relevant to *'ilm al-tafsīr* but generally discussed in *uṣūl al-fiqh* in the discussion of the significations (*dalālah*) of texts. It refers to the most likely meaning of a text, but one which does not exclude other possibilities. See Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. (Kuala Lumpur: Ilmiah Publishers, 1999), 91-4.

generations following the Prophet, when tafsir was limited to the narrations of the companions and their followers, to the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid periods, when *kalām* flourished, and finally to later times when philosophy and mysticism were prevalent. These trends color the tafsirs from each of these periods, and as a whole Ṭabāṭabā’ī believes they fail to seriously use the Qur’an itself to explain its apparent meanings. In the ‘Allāmah’s eyes examples of the narration-based trend are Abū Ishāq Tha‘labī’s (d.427/1035) *al-Kashf wa-l-Bayān ‘an Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, the theological phase is embodied in Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī’s (d.606/1209) *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, and the third mystical trend by ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī’s (d.730/1330) *al-Ta’wīlāt*.⁴ These kinds of tafsir fall into the following categories. Either they contain more eisegesis than exegesis, namely they either impose the personal opinions of the exegete on the Qur’an rather than “letting the Qur’an speak for itself”; in the language of the Prophetic hadith this is called “tafsir according to one’s personal opinion” (*tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*) and is condemned in the strongest terms.⁵ Or, by restricting themselves to *riwāyāt*, they place unnecessary restrictions on themselves for probing the general meanings of the Qur’anic verses, and those relying on the narrations attributed to the early Muslim generations (*salaf*) rather than an Infallible are actually eisegesis in disguise, as will be explained in the next chapter.

The problem is not so much the scholarly conclusions of tafsirs containing eisegesis or personal opinion; according to Prophetic hadith the “eisegete” might even

⁴ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Qur’ān dar Islām*, 69-70.

⁵ The most famous of the hadith condemning tafsir by personal opinion is “whoever interprets the Qur’an according to his own opinion [or, ‘without knowledge’] should take his seat in the Hellfire” (*man fassara-l-Qur’ān bi-ra’yihī [bi-ghayr ‘ilm] fa-yatabaww’ū maq’adihī min-l-nār*). Ṭabāṭabā’ī collects a number of these traditions from in a narrative section on the authority of both prominent Sunni and Shī’ī *muhaddithīn*. M 3:87. In technical terms, he calls the *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y* hadith “abundantly narrated” (*mustafīdah*). M 5:280.

“hit the mark” in his conclusions.⁶ Rather the problem from Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s view is that these scholars call their methodology proper tafsir when it is in fact rarely the case. After summarily excluding these types of hadith, theological, philosophical and mystical approaches to Qur’anic exegesis the question remains, how should authentic tafsir be conducted?

Perhaps the most explicit articulation of Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s hermeneutical vision of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an comes not from the pages of *al-Mīzān* but rather from a separate treatise, *Qur’ān dar Islām*. Originally written in Persian and later translated into Arabic and English, this concise treatise is an excellent companion guide to *al-Mīzān*. Under the heading “how does the Qur’an lend itself to interpretation,” Ṭabāṭabā’ī argues for his methodology as well as its proofs in his characteristically succinct way:

In tafsir of the Qur’anic verses there are three paths before us. First, tafsir of a verse on its own by means of academic or non-academic preliminaries (*muqaddimāt ‘ilmī wa ghayr ‘ilmī*) which are already in our possession. Secondly, tafsir of a verse by the help of a *riwāyah* that was been narrated by an Infallible (*ma’sūm*) in relation to that verse. Thirdly, tafsir of a verse by the aid of contemplation (*tadabbur*) and letting the meaning of the verse speak for itself (*istintāq*) from the totality of related verses, and benefiting (*istifādah*) from *riwāyāt* when possible.⁷

The first style the ‘Allāmah equates with pure eisegesis, *tafsir bi-l-ra’y*, “excepting that which conforms with the third style.” The second style, *tafsir bi-l-riwāyāt* or *tafsir bi-l-*

⁶ “Whoever discusses the Qur’an according to his personal opinion and hits the mark has still erred” (*Man takallama fi-l-Qur’ān fa-aṣāba fa-qad akhṭa’*). M 3:87. The hadith is narrated by the prominent Sunni *muhaddithīn* Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī, and Nisā’ī.

⁷ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Qur’ān dar Islām*, 76.

ma'thūr, has traditionally been the most common, starting with the first complete available tafsir, Abū Jarīr Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* and continuing until today. Ṭabāṭabā'ī finds numerous defects with this style which will be examined further in the next chapter, suffice it to say the available *riwāyāt*, even when taken from a trustworthy source, are few in number and then only offer limited guidance on how to deal with the “hundreds and thousands of academic and non-academic questions” presented in the Qur'an.⁸ This approach is inherently restricted (*maḥdūd*). The 'Allāmah's chosen methodology, which he calls real tafsir (*tafsīr-i wāqī'ī*), is summarized in the third path, particularly by the terms *tadabbur* and *istinṭāq*. *Tadabbur* is found four times in the Qur'an in its verbal form with the meaning of “to contemplate or reflect.”⁹ An *āyah* Ṭabāṭabā'ī frequently cites as a proof for his hermeneutics is: “do they not contemplate the Qur'an? Had it been from [someone] other than Allah, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it.”¹⁰ In his commentary he explains that the most likely meaning of *tadabbur* is “to contemplate one verse after another” (*ta'ammul fī-l-āyah 'aqīb al-āyah*.)” After discussing how the lack of discrepancies is a proof for its divine provenance, Ṭabāṭabā'ī concludes that the verse explains how the ordinary person can grasp the Qur'an, and that its verses interpret each other.¹¹ In *al-Mizān*, the 'Allāmah frequently prefaces or ends a commentary by remarking “this is what *tadabbur* on the verse yields.”

The second term encapsulating Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hermeneutic is *istinṭāq*, literally “to make speak.” The term originates in a hadith found in the Shī'ī sources from 'Alī ibn

⁸ *Ibid.* 77.

⁹ Q 4:82, 37:24, 23:68, 38:29.

¹⁰ Q 4:82.

¹¹ M 5:20-1.

Abī Ṭālib, describing the Qur'an: "The Book of Allah is that through which you see, you speak and you hear. Its one part speaks for another and one part testifies to another" (*yanṭiq ba 'duhu bi-ba 'dīn wa yashhadu ba 'duhu bi-ba 'd*).¹² Similarly, there is the saying from Imam 'Alī: "[Allah] had mentioned that one part of the Qur'an verifies (*yaṣduq*) another part and that there is no divergence in it as He says 'do they not contemplate the Qur'an? Had it been from [someone] other than Allah, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it'".¹³ Along with the above *āyah* these hadith are the most common narrative (*naqlī*) proofs cited by the 'Allāmah when arguing for tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. The true *mufassir*, then, must act as both a *mutadabbir* and *mustanṭiq*, deeply pondering on each verse in relation to its context and place in the overall Qur'anic worldview so as to make the Book speak for itself.

A comparable scenario may be seen in *fiqh* and the derivation of the positive laws (*istinbāṭ al-aḥkam al-far'īyah*). The elaboration of *uṣūl al-tafsīr* is no less vital than the precision of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. A mujtahid in *fiqh* may give a correct fatwa but if his methodology and principles (*uṣūl*) are unsound he still is condemned according to reason and Sunnah. Similarly when an exegete derives an "exegetical ruling" (*istinbāṭ al-āyāt*) it is possible that his ruling is sound, but if the foundations are based on personal opinion then his work is not valid tafsir.¹⁴ It is noteworthy that Ṭabāṭabā'ī sometimes utilizes language reminiscent of the technical terminology of *fiqh*. In a certain sense his

¹² M 1:15; 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Compiled by Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāḍī. Beirut: Dār al-Murtaḍā, 1423/2003), khuṭbah 133. Translated by Syed Ali Raza. Qum: Ansariyan Publications, n.d.

¹³ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, khuṭbah 18. According to a student of the 'Allāmah the apparently contradictory well-known saying of Imam 'Alī: "that is the Qu'ran, if you ask it to speak (*fa-stanṭiqūhu*) it will not do so, but I will tell you about it." (*khuṭbah* 158) refers to the "secrets and inner meaning (*bāṭin*)" of the Qur'an. 'Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Tasnīm: Tafsīr-i Qur'an-i Karīm*. 8 vols. (Qum: Isrā', 1378 SH), 1:102.

¹⁴ The comparison between condemned *tafsir* and *iftā'* is explicitly mentioned in a hadith related in Shi'i sources, 'Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Qur'an dar Qur'an*. (Qum: Isrā', 1378 SH).

reformulation of the foundations of Qur'anic hermeneutics is comparable to previous developments in Shī'ī *fiqh*, particularly the Uṣūlī and Akhbārī conflict over the nature and extent of *ijtihād* vis-à-vis the revealed legal texts (*nusūṣ*).¹⁵ Just as the Akhbārīs and the various Sunni hadīth movements developed a jurisprudence that sought to minimize or eliminate scholarly *ijtihād* with the legal texts, the majority of classical exegetes were content to limit their interpretation of the Qur'an to the mere citation of narrations of the early generations of Muslims and/or the opinions of the grammarians without much further reflection on the significance of the *āyāt* within the overall Qur'anic worldview.

Returning to the prologue of *al-Mizān*, at the end of his overview of the history of tafsīr Ṭabāṭabā'ī saves his strongest critique for a “new style” developed by a “group claiming to follow Islam but out of their immersion in the natural and social sciences and the like...have inclined to the way of the sensationalists from the European philosophers or the pragmatists.” Here, early in the introduction, Ṭabāṭabā'ī takes aim for the first but not last time at the opponents of philosophical reasoning and metaphysics, those who say “that religious knowledge cannot oppose the path which the modern sciences affirm, namely that the only foundation in existence is matter and its sensible characteristics. Whatever religion informs us of its existence which modern science denies, like the divine throne, pedestal, tablet or pen must be interpreted in a suitable manner.”¹⁶ This is one indication among many from *al-Mizān* and his biography that a critique of materialism was one of his top priorities. Perhaps one of the most persistent themes of *al-Mizān* is the denouncement of materialism (*aṣālat al-māddah*) and empiricism

¹⁵ There are numerous studies on the Uṣūlī and Akhbārī dispute. Ones of note include Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shī'ī Jurisprudence*. (Leiden: Brill, 2000); and Etan Kohlberg, *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi'ism*. (Aldershot, Hampshire : Variorum, 1991).

¹⁶ M 1:10.

(*madhhab al-ḥiss*) especially as a means to interpret religious teachings (*ma'ārif*). An exegetical product of this approach is the contemporary hermeneutics of “scientific tafsirs,” which will be examined in Chapter Five. Not much later in the first volume of *al-Mīzān* he discusses this rejection of reasoning in religion as not only out of place when discussing metaphysical issues but is in fact one of the main causes of the distortion of all the “Qur’anic realities.” “The realities” (*ḥaqā’iq*) is perhaps one of the central terms found in all of Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s works, and will be examined separately in Chapter Five. It is also important to bear in mind that for Ṭabāṭabā’ī the opponents of philosophical reasoning cover not only contemporary Muslims, who are “overawed by western civilization” and feel compelled to hastily reject certain hadith or interpret away verses which do not conform to the dictates of modern science and empiricism, but also the strict traditionalists, who by confining themselves to the literal meanings of hadith falsely conceive many sublime metaphysical ideas in a quasi-materialist or superficial manner.

Summarizing his objections to the various styles of tafsir, whether from the classic or modern exegetes, Ṭabāṭabā’ī laments that they all share a common major defect (“and what a bad defect it is”) in their imposition of preconceived views onto the Qur’an. The concomitant of these hermeneutics is that the Qur’an needs others to act as a guide, whereas the Qur’an explicitly says that it is a guide for people, a perspicuous book, and explanation for everything.¹⁷ In his quest for an authentic tafsir methodology Ṭabāṭabā’ī casts these hermeneutics aside.

It must be emphasized that the ‘Allāmah’s firm insistence on “letting the Book speak for itself” does not mean that he sought to indiscriminately dismiss all previous

¹⁷ Q 6:91, 5:15, 16:89.

scholarly work. As his biography attests, he was firmly grounded in the traditional scholarship and thoughtfully shifted through the intellectual opinions of prominent *'ulamā'*, Shī'ī and Sunni.¹⁸ His vision of tafsir is not for the haphazard dismissal of the traditional sciences in favor of a modernist style, rather as mentioned previously he was highly critical of what he viewed as their crypto-materialism. At the same time he is neither interested in blindly following the ancients for tradition's sake. From the point of view of his hermeneutics any methodology which fails to uncover the apparent meanings of the *āyāt* without seriously utilizing the Qur'an as its own exegete will inevitably lead to *ra'y* and therefore cannot be called real tafsir. Any tafsir not based on the premise that the Qur'an is a complete worldview, independent in its core teachings and probative force of other texts or opinions and also harmonious and coherent in its main themes, will inevitably fail to cast light on its fundamental concepts.

Next in the introduction, Ṭabāṭabā'ī takes up a question which at first appears to be unrelated to tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, but in fact contains what is perhaps his most incisive definition of the methodology. He begins by remarking that in spite of centuries of generally less than adequate exegesis, the Qur'an still performs its main function of guiding and enlightening humanity, since its words and general concepts are clear. This holds true even for *āyāt mutashābihāt*, the so-called ambiguous verses, since their ambiguity arises from the application of their concept, not the concept itself. Here Ṭabāṭabā'ī elaborates one of his key principles for interpreting the most controversial Qur'anic terms and concepts, while at the same time avoiding the theological

¹⁸ For example, Nasr reports that Ṭabāṭabā'ī carefully studied the infamously prolix tafsir of the staunch Ash'arī Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī while writing *al-Mizān*. When asked why he paid such close attention to a work containing theological opinions at odds with his own, he replied that it contains "much valuable material". Seyyed Hossein Nasr. "The Qur'anic Commentaries of Mullā Ṣadrā," *Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu*. Eds. Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 57 footnote 9.

superficiality of the crypto-materialists, both the traditionalists and modernists. The Qur’anic realities can be readily understood as general concepts (*mafāhīm*) but differ from what we know of those concepts in terms of their material examples (*maṣāḍīq māddīyah*), or what is called in classical logic “extension”. Since in this life our sights are mostly set on the material side of things, when we hear any concept or verse, from ordinary speech or divine speech, the first thing that comes to our minds is the material application of that idea. For example, when the Qur’an repeatedly says “God created” or “God knew” we imagine those acts to be limited to a specific time, since this is what we know of those acts. Similarly with verses like “to God returns all affairs”¹⁹ or “what is with God is best and everlasting”²⁰ we automatically restrict those concepts to a certain place. This is especially true for those concepts mentioned in the Qur’an which have common mundane equivalents, like the throne, the pen, the tablet, the garden, and the fire. In a certain way this is a natural reaction, since those words were first contrived for concrete applications, and later took on immaterial connotations. But even the material aspects of words undergo constant change, for instance a scale, weapon or lamp used today may have little resemblance to those used in the past, yet still we call them by their previous names. Here Ṭabāṭabā’ī submits that the underlying reason for the name of a thing is its purpose, not its outward shape or form. This is one principle that is frequently used in *al-Mīzān* to elucidate the subtle relationship between the inevitable limitations of human language and the existential vastness of the theological concepts, specifically *tawḥīd*, *waḥy*, and *ma‘ād*, which are at the heart of the Qur’anic message.

Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s other related conclusion is that the Qur’anic metaphysical concepts

¹⁹ Q 3:109, 8:44, 22:76.

²⁰ Q 28:60.

can be understood to have a similarity to their physical counterparts in their shared underlying concept (called intension in classical logic) but only when divested of their material limitations and deficiencies can we begin to grasp their metaphysical applications, or extensions. This principle of “common intension with a separate extension” is a fundamental one in Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s hermeneutics and has a precedent in the Safavid-era polymath Muḥsin “Fayḍ” Kāshānī (d.1091/1680).²¹ In the introduction to his narrative-based *al-Ṣāfi*, Kāshānī has a section the knowledge of which “opens a door which can open (to those who are deserving) a thousand doors,” namely that “for every type of meaning there is [behind it] a reality and spirit, as well as a form and mold, for it may be that there are many forms and molds for one reality. That is because verbal utterances (*alfāz*) were only contrived [to contain] realities and spirits...” Kāshānī then gives examples to illustrate the principle. “The word ‘pen’ was only contrived for a tool which imprints images on tablets, without considering whether this tool is made of wood or iron, or even if the pen is a material thing or whether its imprints are sensible or not.”²²

Ṭabāṭabā’ī reiterates that when the strict traditionalists (*hashwīyah*),²³ are confronted with these concepts or verses they take the materialist path and hold to their surface meanings, even though this approach is clearly denied by the Qur’an itself, for example when it declares that some of its verses are “multivalent.”²⁴ At the other

²¹ For Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s general admiration of Kāshānī’s scholarly methodology, especially his scrupulous separation of topics in his works, see Tihirānī, *Mihr-i Tābān*, 26.

²² al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi*, 1:29. Mullā Ṣadrā also took this approach to the *mutashābihāt* and it is probable that he was the one who taught it to his student Kāshānī. See Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Tā’rikh al-‘Arabī, 1424/2003), 181.

²³ *Hashwīyah* is a common pejorative for the *muḥaddithīn* who reject all forms of ijtihad, even when it is not associated with *ra’y*. For an account of history and usage of the term see A. S. Halkin, “The Hashawīyya,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54 (1934): 1-28.

²⁴ Q 3:7. An extreme example of such literalism is the claim of Ibn Taymīyah that the Qur’an contains no metaphorical language (*majāz*), ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *Kitāb al-Īmān* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘ādah, 1325). 35.

extreme are some of the philosophers, theologians and mystics who construct their own views for these concepts in their theoretical writings, then impose them on the Qur'an, interpreting away any verse which does not conform to their views, a process which they call *ta'wīl*. For Ṭabāṭabā'ī this is nothing other than *ra'y* and derives from their understanding of *ta'wīl*, not its Qur'anic sense. Ṭabāṭabā'ī again emphasizes that both methods are condemned by the same book whose concepts these scholars are attempting to elucidate, and that the correct option is that "the exegete explains the verse with the help of other relevant verses, reflecting on them together (and reflection has been forcefully urged upon by the Qur'an itself) and identifies the individual person or thing by its particulars and attributes mentioned in the verse." Or more explicitly:

There's a difference between a researcher who looks at the meaning of a verse and says 'what does the Qur'an say?' and one who says 'what idea must we impose on this verse?' The former forgets every pre-conceived theory and goes where the Qur'an leads him. The latter has already decided what theories to impose on the Qur'anic verses. It is clear that this type of approach is not one which researches the meaning of the verse per se.²⁵

This last statement encapsulates the 'Allāmah's vision of authentic tafsir.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī tersely concludes the prologue by stating that "as a result of these exegetical expositions (*bayānāt*) arranged accorded to this method of research, the following issues are completely discussed." Seven topics, all intimately related to *uṣūl al-dīn*, particularly "the origin and return" (*mabda' wa ma'ād*), are then enumerated. These topics are the names and attributes of Allah, the acts of Allah, the intermediary

²⁵ M 1:9.

links (*wasā'it*) between Allah and man such as the divine throne or the angels, man's life before this world, in this world (Ṭabāṭabā'ī particularly emphasizes the role of the prophets and revelation), after this world in the *barzakh* and resurrection, and finally issues concerning human character, such as virtuous traits. What is immediately apparent and noteworthy about this list is how closely it conforms with the list of topics in the essays written about ten years earlier in Tabriz and published posthumously as *al-Rasā'il al-Ṭawḥīdīyah*, especially the names and attributes of God, the reality of intermediaries (and the related philosophical topic of causation), and the three-fold journey of man from origin to return. Also significant is the 'addition to the list in *al-Mīzān* of ethics and the "spiritual stations of the saints" (*maqāmāt al-awliyā'*), which conforms to his conviction that ethical development and spiritual wayfaring are necessary concomitants of the proper study of philosophy and theology. Ṭabāṭabā'ī views self-knowledge and discursive reasoning as two indispensable ways to religious knowledge which complement each other as well as support the knowledge obtained from revelation.

In the preface the author notes that he will not delve into the various legal questions raised by the *āyāt al-aḥkām*, although he occasionally indulges in some lengthy discussions of verses connected with socio-political and controversial legal issues, although as is his wont he places these discussions outside the main section of the tafsir itself.²⁶ As noted in the previous chapter, the 'Allāmah, despite his proficiency in *fiqh* and awareness of the contemporary social and political problems of the Muslim world, was first and foremost a theologian and philosopher. His somewhat cursory approach to legal issues in *al-Mīzān* also reflects his aspiration for the renewal of the non-*fiqh* fields

²⁶ For example his discussion of family and marital issues in M 4:185-204 or socio-political issues in M 4:94-136. The validity of the controversial legal issues *mut'at al-ḥajj* and *mut'at al-nisā'* is dealt with in M 2:88-96 and M 4:296-318, respectively.

of the *ḥawzah*.

At the end of the preface, Ṭabāṭabā'ī reaffirms the efficacy of his hermeneutics, tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, stating, "...as a direct result of this method, we never felt any need to interpret a verse against its apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*). As we have said earlier, this type of 'interpretation' is in fact misinterpretation." He also reaffirms the authenticity of this methodology based on the Sunnah, appropriating the term *ma'thūr*, normally used to positively describe narrative-based tafsir, and ingeniously applying it to tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. "On pursuing the traditions transmitted from them [the Infallibles], peace be upon them, the reflective researcher will notice that this new [exegetical] path is the oldest 'handed down' path (*aqdam al-turuq al-ma'thūrah*) in tafsir, which its teachers [also] followed (Allah's peace be upon them)."²⁷

A New yet Familiar Hermeneutic

Ṭabāṭabā'ī was not the first scholar who proposed tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. In practical terms, however, the attention which the author of *al-Mizān* paid to the meaning of the idea as well as the rigor in which he applied it to tafsir clearly exceeds previous exegetes. From his point of view the vast majority of exegetes practically "abandoned it, leaving it unpursued" (*matrūk ghayr maslūk*).²⁸ On the theoretical level, it is apparent from the introductions of the classical tafsirs and the treatises devoted to "the principles of exegesis" that tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an is hardly given much attention. The neo-Ḥanbalī Ibn Taymīyah (d.728/1328) in his *Muqaddimat fī Uṣūl al-*

²⁷ M 1:16-7.

²⁸ M 1:75.

*Tafsīr*²⁹ states “if you ask what the best method of tafsir is, the answer is the best way is to explain the Qur’an through the Qur’an. For what the Qur’an alludes to at one place is explained at the other, and what it says in brief on one occasion is elaborated upon in another.”³⁰ Significantly, this brief statement is the only one in fifty pages which addresses the issue of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an. Already in the next sentence, without any further discussion, he embarks on an extended discussion of the Sunnah and the sayings of the *salaf*. In this type of hermeneutics tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an is merely one component among many in performing *tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*, almost mentioned as an afterthought. A glance at the contents of the *Muqaddimah* shows what is really at issue is *tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*, before making the aforementioned statement, which would be expected to the first topic in such a treatise, dozens of pages have passed on what are apparently more critical questions for the author; the care of the companions and successors in learning the meanings of the Qur’an, the surface differences between the *salaf* in tafsir, and the reprehensive exegetical innovations of the Mu’tazilīs, Sufis and Shi’ah in tafsir. Looking at his methodology in practice, for example in his tafsir of Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ,³¹ Ibn Taymīyah lives up to his reputation as a fiercely polemical proto-Salafī; half the time he shifts through the opinions of the *salaf*, the other half he lambastes the supposed deviations of the philosophers, theologians and mystics.

Although in his highly-praised tafsir ‘Imād al-Dīn Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373) has

²⁹ ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimat fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘at al-Salafiyah, 1385). Many prominent scholars, including Ibn Kathīr, Suyūṭī, Badr al-Dīn Zarkashī, Rashīd Ridā, and Jamāl al-Dīn Qāsimī, to name a few, take Ibn Taymīyah’s treatise as authoritative and frequently make reference to it in their exegetical works. It is also curious, and perhaps indicative of the relative lack of attention given to the issue by the exegetes, both Sunni and Shi’ī, that besides the *Muqaddimah* there are hardly any prominent classical treatises on *uṣūl al-tafsīr*.

³⁰ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, 42.

³¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*. (Cairo: Maktabat Anṣār al-Sunnat al-Muḥammadiyah, n.d.).

approvingly quoted almost verbatim his teacher Ibn Taymīyah on tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, neither does his work is there an indication what it precisely entails. Like his teacher, in practice Ibn Kathīr relies heavily on *riwāyāt*, especially the opinions attributed to the *salaf*. In his tafsir there are frequent digressions concerning technical narrative issues more germane to 'ilm al-hadīth than the *zāhir al-āyāt*. Again, what Ibn Kathīr intends by tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an appears to be little more than the occasional perfunctory quoting of some *āyāt* as a decoration for the real hermeneutics, *tafsīr bi-l-riwāyāt*.

Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, a *mutakallim* who took a significantly different hermeneutical approach than the *muhaddithīn*, also affirms in his *Mafātīh al-Ghayb* that the Qur'an interprets itself. "Truly tafsir of the speech of Allah by the speech of Allah is the closest path to veracity and correctness."³² Yet even a cursory glance at its contents leaves the reader wondering where the principle is found in what is by and large a work of *kalām*. His supposed tafsir of the *basmalah* consists of a more than eighty page exhibition of myriad theological issues, such as "intellectual and narrative discussion concerning 'name'", "the divine names indicating the true attributes", and numerous other digressions "connected to the word 'Allah'".³³ Regarding Rāzī's attention to tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, Ibn Taymīyah's acidic remark that the *Mafātīh* contains "everything but tafsir"³⁴ is apropos.

Until recently, neither have the Shī'ī *mufasssīrīn* paid much attention to the issue of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. As would be expected, the earliest tafsirs from the

³² Legarde, *Index du Grande commentaire*, 23.

³³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. *Mafātīh al-Ghayb (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)*. 30 vols. (n.p. [Tehran?], n.p. n.d.), 1:101-83.

³⁴ McAulliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 68.

muhaddithīn like Furāt ibn Furāt Kūfī (fl. mid third/ninth centuries) ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm Qummī (fl. late third/early tenth centuries), and Abū-l-Naḍr Muḥammad ibn Mas‘ūd “Ayyāshī” (fl. late third/ninth centuries) focus almost exclusively on *riwāyāt*, especially the central role of the Infallible Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt in correctly understanding the Qur’an.³⁵ For example, the incomplete tafsir attributed to ‘Ayyāshī contains an introduction consisting entirely of narrations. The most that could be said of the ijtihad of the compiler was his selection of related hadith under various headings (*abwāb*). In the introduction there are sections concerning “the rejection of narrations conflicting with the Book of Allah,” and the Infallible Imam’s knowledge of the inner and outer levels of the Qur’an,³⁶ but no discussion of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an. What these early Shī‘ī tafsirs offer is simply *tafsīr bi-l-riwāyāt*.

Turning to *al-Tibyān*, the pivotal exegesis of Abū Ja‘far “Shaykh al-Ṭā’ifāh” Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), it is clear that the author has shifted the exegetical focus from strict narration of the *riwāyāt* of Ahl al-Bayt to grammatical and linguistic issues and the debates of the *mutakallimīn*, yet there is no indication of the role of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an. From the time of Shaykh Ṭūsī until Ṭabāṭabā’ī there has been little substantial change in the course of Shī‘ī tafsir. Abū-l-Faḍl Ṭabarsī’s (d.548/1153) *Majma‘ al-Bayān*, perhaps the most popular tafsir among the Shī‘ah, is essentially an edited and reworked version of *al-Tibyān*, as the author alludes to in the prologue, and is

³⁵ On early Shī‘ī tafsir see Meir M. Bar-Asher. *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*. (Leiden: Brill, 1999); and Mahmoud Ayoub. “The Speaking Qur’an and the Silent Qur’an: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Shī‘ī *tafsīr*,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippen, 177-98.

³⁶ Muḥammad ibn Mas‘ūd al-Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*. 2 vols. (Tehran: al-Maktabat al-‘Ilmīyah al-Islāmīyah, n.d.), 2-18.

apparent on comparing the two works.³⁷ *Rawḍ al-Jinān wa Rawḥ al-Janān* of Abū-l-Futūḥ Rāzī (fl. early sixth/twelfth centuries) while notable stylistically as perhaps the earliest Shī‘ī tafsīr in Persian,³⁸ in terms of content is similar to Ṭūsī and Ṭabarsī’s works and offers nothing on tafsīr of the Qur’an by the Qur’an. Other standard works such as Ḥuwayzī’s (d. 1053/1643) *Nūr al-Thaqalayn* and Fayḍ Kāshānī’s *al-Ṣāfi* are collections of the early narration works with some additional hadith and the occasional brief commentary.

Ṭabāṭabā‘ī’s goal in *al-Mizān*, then, is the reformulation and renewal of the *uṣūl al-tafsīr* using scholarly *ijtihād*, and elucidating the apparent meanings of the Qur’anic verses without dwelling on any theological, philosophical, mystical, philological or grammatical point during the exposition section. The result is a “balance” between traditionalists who slavishly imitate the past masters and modernists who crudely break with tradition.³⁹

Defining *Tafsīr bi-l-Ra’y*

In Volume Three under a narrative section, Ṭabāṭabā‘ī takes up in detail the important exegetical question mentioned in the prologue, namely what is the intent of the Prophetic hadith “whoever interprets the Qur’an according to his own opinion should take his seat in the Hellfire,” or in other words the scope of invalid tafsīr.⁴⁰ Although in

³⁷ Karīmān in his study on Ṭabarsī’s tafsīr plays down the similarities between the two. While it is true that Ṭabarsī has added a good amount of material not found in *Tibyān*, and is more comprehensive than Ṭūsī’s work, his overall methodology is still not far removed from Ṭūsī’s. Husayn Karīmān, *Ṭabarsī va Majma‘ al-Bayān*. 2 vols. (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Danishgāh-yi Tīhrān, 1341 SH), 2:49

³⁸ McAulliffe, *Qur’anic Christians*, 55.

³⁹ As far as the present writer is aware Ṭabāṭabā‘ī never explained why he chose to call his tafsīr *al-Mizān*. Perhaps it is related to his efforts to find a balance in Qur’anic hermeneutics.

⁴⁰ M 3:87-101.

the main text of *al-Mizān* the section is given the basic title “another tradition-based discussion,” significantly in the index it is called “what is meant by *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y* and [conversely] what is true tafsir (*ḥaqq al-tafsīr*).”⁴¹ The title given in the index perfectly summarizes the goal of the section; an explanation that every hermeneutic other than tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an falls outside the category of true tafsir and tends towards *ra’y*. It is the most detailed explanation in *al-Mizān* explaining why the majority of previous hermeneutics can be categorized either as static *taqlīd*, presumptuous *ra’y*, or a combination of both.

The discussion is related to the verse in the *bayān* section and is connected with the author’s attempt to uncover the meaning of *āyāt mutashābihāt* as well as *al-ta’wīl*, two foundational terms in Qur’anic hermeneutics. After an extensive discussion of their meaning and significance, Ṭabāṭabā’ī concludes that much of the intellectual ills afflicting the Muslims from the time of the Prophet until today can be traced to the misinterpretation and misapplication of these concepts. This is especially the case with the *mutashābihāt*, which can easily be taken out of context to support deviant intellectual tendencies and schools of thought.⁴² The misinterpretation of these *āyāt* is a clear example of *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*, and perhaps this is the reason why Ṭabāṭabā’ī added a separate discussion on the issue at this point in his tafsir. This section begins simply with a collection of the Sunni and Shī’ī hadith which prohibit tafsir according to personal opinion, starting with “whoever interprets the Qur’an according to his opinion...” Ṭabāṭabā’ī points out that, contrary to the opinions of some of the strict traditionalists, the

⁴¹ Although it is not clear whether the entry titles in the index to *al-Mizān* are from the ‘Allāmah or the publisher, Ṭabāṭabā’ī uses the term *ḥaqq al-tafsīr* in M 1:11.

⁴² One student of Ṭabāṭabā’ī enumerates six major theological tendencies, such as anthropomorphism, determinism, and impugning the prophets with sins, which can be traced to personal interpretations of the *mutashābihāt*. Jawādī Āmulī, *Qur’ān dar Qur’ān*. (Qum: Isrā’, 1378 SH), 410-12.

tafsir bi-l-ra'y hadith do not forbid tafsir based on scholarly ijtiḥād of the exegete.

Many *muḥaddithīn* interpret the above hadith to mean that *ra'y* covers any discussion of a verse without first referring to a hadith. First, Ṭabāṭabā'ī points out that the *tafsir bi-l-ra'y* hadith themselves differ with this interpretation. A closer examination of their contents shows that what the hadith forbid, some of them explicitly so,⁴³ is tafsir based on ignorance, while tafsir based on careful reflection on the Qur'an itself with the aid of the appropriate tools is not *tafsir bi-ghayr 'ilm*. In fact the Qur'anic verses yield more certain knowledge than most of the available hadith, for unlike them its source is definite and its text protected from alteration. "It is clear that [tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an] is not what the Prophet warned against when he said "whoever interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion should prepare for himself a place in the Hellfire." [Our] method uses the Qur'an to explain itself and is not based merely on explanation arising from *ra'y*."⁴⁴ For example, some of the *tafsir bi-l-ra'y* hadith are explicit in placing the blame on the exegete, for example "whosoever speaks about the Qur'an according to *his* opinion...." The prohibition relates to the opinion of the exegete, not the permissibility of knowledge-based ijtiḥād.

The Prophet [in this hadith] has used the phrase 'his opinion'; *ra'y* means belief stemming from personal striving (*ijtiḥād*), sometimes it applies to an opinion based upon whim and personal preferences (*istiḥsān*). In any case since the personal pronoun 'his' is connected to the word *ra'y* we know that the intention of this hadith is not to prohibit every type of ijtiḥād (*ijtiḥād mutlaq*) in tafsir of the Qur'an, so that the consequence of this command would only be to blindly obey

⁴³ For example, "whoever interprets the Qur'an without knowledge should take his seat in the Hellfire", M 3:87.

⁴⁴ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Qur'ān dar Islām*, 77.

what has come down to us in the narrations of the Prophet and his Family- as the traditionalists (*ahl al-hadīth*) interpret it.⁴⁵

Ṭabāṭabā'ī concludes that “exerting one’s utmost to contemplate” (*yajtahid fi-l-tadabbur*)⁴⁶ all the relevant verses to elucidate the apparent meaning of the verse under discussion, beyond the mere citation of the opinions of the grammarians and hadith scholars, is prohibited by neither Qur’an nor Sunnah. On the contrary, as with the secondary laws of the Shariah, this *ijtihād* remains a constant necessity, both from the point of view of intellect and tradition. The question remains whether it is based on knowledge or *ra’y*.

Unlike tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, the question of tafsir by personal opinion has been quite prominent among the classical *mufasssīrīn*. Starting with Ṭabarī, most of them included a section at least touching on the issue. Generally their discussions focused on the aforementioned Prophetic hadith condemning the practice, and affirming that mastery of the exegetical or Qur’anic sciences (*‘ulūm al-tafsīr*) was the way for a *mufasssīr* to avoid it. A typical enumeration of these skills is those provided in Jālāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)’s standard *al-Itqān fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. They include Arabic language (*‘ilm al-lughah, naḥw* and *ṣarf*), rhetoric (*‘ilm al-ma‘ānī, bayān, badī‘*), the various standard recitations (*‘ilm al-qirā’āt*), *uṣūl al-dīn* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*.⁴⁷ As would be expected, most of the classical exegetes emphasized mastery of *‘ilm al-ḥadīth* in

⁴⁵ M 3:88.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Ṭabāṭabā'ī also uses the terms “Exerting one’s utmost” (*istifrāgh al-wus‘*) or “exerting utmost effort” (*badhl al-juhd*) to describe the process of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an. These terms are highly reminiscent of the definitions for *ijtihād* given in the classical books of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*. 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam ibn Abī-l-Arqam, n.d.), 2:510; and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, *Durūs fī ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*. 2 vols. (Qum: Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1418), 1:57.

⁴⁷ Jālāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1415/1995), 2: 397-9.

general and the tafsir-related *riwāyāt* (including the opinions of the *salaf*) in particular, as a sure way to shun *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*.

In Volume Three Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues that the Prophet hadith condemning “speaking without knowledge about the Qur'an” does not per se mean tafsir without knowledge of these various disciplines. While the *'ulūm al-tafsīr* are indispensable tools for understanding individual words and clarifying certain grammatical issues, they play a limited role in interpreting the apparent meanings of the *āyāt*, or defining those terms which besides their common linguistic connotations have a specifically Qur'anic meaning.⁴⁸ Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not see their mere skillful employment as ensuring true tafsir, since by themselves they do not elucidate the significance and meaning of the Qur'anic verses, only some of their formal linguistic or rhetoric aspects.⁴⁹

A few of the classical scholars went a step further from the aforementioned advocates of exegesis by *riwāyāt* and the *'ulūm al-tafsīr* as the correct method to avoid tafsir by personal opinion. They argued that tafsir in the sense of employing ijtihad and seeking all possible meanings of the Qur'anic verses should not necessarily be classified as *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*. Prominent among these proponents for ijtihad in tafsir is Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī (d. 504/1111) who refers to the verses commending deep reflection on the Qur'an as arguments for ijtihad in tafsir beyond the mere citation of the opinions of the *salaf*. Ghazālī's arguments are particularly relevant for understanding Ṭabāṭabā'ī's criticism of the classical approach to *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*, since many of his proofs against their standards conform to his. For example, unlike practically every other classical

⁴⁸ The role of authentic hadith in tafsir is a special case which will be addressed in Chapter Three. Ṭabāṭabā'ī repeatedly affirms, however, that there are a number of Qur'anic legal terms the meanings of which must be derived from the definite Sunnah. M 2:238, 3:98.

⁴⁹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Qur'ān dar Islām*, 88.

Suuni *mufassir*, Ghazālī explicitly challenges the assumption that the *salaf*'s ijtihad in tafsir is more valid than others. There are glaring discrepancies between them in interpretation, and even then “what Ibn ‘Abbās or Ibn Mas‘ūd themselves opine is not worthy of acceptance”.⁵⁰ However, behind Ghazālī’s calls for ijtihad in tafsir many scholars have suspected there lies a hidden aspiration to justify fanciful Sufi *ta’wīl*, such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī’s (d. 411/1021) *Ḥaqā’iq al-Tafsīr*.⁵¹ The ‘Allāmah essentially agreed with the *muḥaddithīn* who categorized far-fetched “*ta’wīl*” as a clear instance of *ra’y*. Ijtihad based on personal opinion is still *ra’y* and not proper ijtihad, and the only solution Ghazālī offers for a *mufassir* to eschew false ijtihad and unchecked *ta’wīl* is the usual method of relying on the *‘ulūm al-tafsīr* and *riwāyāt*. While Ghazālī’s advocacy of ijtihad in exegesis is a step closer to Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s hermeneutical vision than most of the classical exegetes, it still fails to address the possibility of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an as the alternative to *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*.

After excluding these classical approaches to *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y* Ṭabāṭabā’ī reiterates what these hadith are in fact excluding is exegesis of the apparent meanings of the Qur’anic verses without knowledge obtained from the Qur’an itself.

The conclusion [from the previous discussion] is that what has been forbidden [by the aforementioned hadith] is only autonomy in Qur’anic exegesis (*istiqlāl fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*) and exegetical self-reliance (*i’timād al-mufassir ‘ala nafsih*) without referring to something else. It means that it is incumbent (*wājib*) [in exegesis] to seek aid from and refer to another. This “other” must either be the Book or the Sunnah; if we say it is the Sunnah then this contradicts the Qur’an and the Sunnah

⁵⁰ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*. 4 vols. (Cairo: Mu’assasat al-Ḥalabī, 1387), 1:389.

⁵¹ Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 56.

themselves which command us to refer to [the Qur'an] and take it as the standard for evaluating hadith (*'ard al-akhbār 'alayh*). For reference and aid in tafsir the only remaining possibility is the Qur'an itself.⁵²

Since the majority of the classical exegetes were first and foremost specialists in grammar, hadith, law or theology, their tafsirs tended to reflect those fields as much as, if not more, than the *zāhir al-āyāt*.

As an example of tafsir based on uninformed personal opinion, as opposed to firm knowledge derived from the Qur'an itself, Ṭabāṭabā'ī cites possible ways of approaching the verse, “And there is not a thing but with Us are its sources (*khazā'in*, literally “treasures”) and We do not send it down but in a fixed [or “known”] measure.”⁵³ If we take the conventional meaning of God dispensing treasures, namely by conflating those words with their mundane equivalents, then this is speaking without knowledge; it could be that God has another way of sending things down. Going a step further based on another verse “and Allah sends down sustenance from the cloud, then gives life thereby to the earth after its death...” we could guess that in the above *āyah* “thing” refers to sustenance and “sending it down” refers to the specific sustenance of rain. This again is conjecture that only rain descends from above. The Qur'an, however, clearly mentions that God sends down many things from the heavens which we have never known to be sent down in our daily lives, such as iron or the Qur'an itself.⁵⁴ In order to properly comprehend what the Qur'an intends by the above verse, we must put aside preconceived opinions and turn to other verses to achieve a fuller picture of what in reality is meant by

⁵² M 3:89.

⁵³ Q 17:21; M 3:91-3. Ṭabāṭabā'ī refers to this verse numerous times (more than forty, according to a computer search), calling it one of the *āyāt al-qadar* (M 2:221) as well as “one of the preeminent (*ghurrah*) Qur'anic verses, containing an abundance of spiritual realities”, M 12:94.

⁵⁴ As in Q 57:25, 97:1.

the sending down of God's treasures. What it means in light of the 'Allāmah's hermeneutics will be analyzed in Chapter Six.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, then, is arguing for a more incisive definition of speaking without knowledge about the Qur'an than previous exegetes, or in other words, a more precise understanding of tafsir based upon firm knowledge. The distinctive hermeneutics of *al-Mīzān*, novel yet still recognizably traditional, can be viewed from the vantage point of the author's expansive reading of *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y* and why *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān* is the sure way to the desired goal of *tafsīr bi-l-'ilm*. The discourse of God cannot be placed on the same semantic level as ordinary discourse, and its terminology and theological concepts cannot be equated with their mundane equivalents. They represent "true realities" and must be understood as such. For Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the essence of *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y* is that the *mufasssīr* "relies solely on his tools of Arabic discourse and then compares the Almighty's speech with human speech."⁵⁵ In theory most of the classical exegetes also understand *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y* this way, yet their solution lay merely in the employment of the tools of tafsir, grammar, hadith, theology or a combination of all three, not tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. True tafsir is when the exegete engages with the Qur'anic verses benefiting from those external tools in order to give expression to the Qur'an's voice.

For Ṭabāṭabā'ī the opinions of the lexicographers, grammarians, rhetoricians, and in a certain sense even the bulk of hadith, the solitary reports (*akhbār āḥād*), are secondary tools designed to clarify the details of tafsir or the formal features of the Qur'an. They are more '*ulūm al-Qur'ān*' than *uṣūl al-tafsīr*. The primary guide and proof

⁵⁵ M 3:88.

(*dalīl*) of a knowledge-based exegesis must be the Qur'an itself, everything else, with the important exception of the definite Sunnah, serves as supporting evidence (*shāhid* or *ta'yīd*) for the main evidence (*dalīl*) derived from tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. The heavy reliance of the previous exegetes on the hadith, especially the *riwāyāt* attributed to the companions and successors, is more of a hindrance than an aid towards a proper interpretation of the apparent meanings of the *āyāt*. Without a strong understanding of these apparent meanings, the door to the spiritual and ethical teachings of the Qur'an remains closed. Ṭabāṭabā'ī is in no way asserting that anyone without the appropriate background in Arabic language, hadith, theology and philosophy should attempt tafsir. All of these tools, especially the authentic hadith, play an invaluable role in serious *ijtihād* in tafsir, but it is still a secondary role. Since hadith has played a very prominent role in Islamic intellectual history in general, and in tafsir literature in particular, its position in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's unique hermeneutics will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three:
Problems with *Tafsīr bi-l-Riwāyāt*

“A Limited Path”

The actual location of the hadith in ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s monumental exegesis illustrates well its role in his hermeneutics. With very few exceptions the author mentions no *riwāyāt*¹ in the exposition (*bayān*) section, the main section of his tafsir, where, as mentioned in Chapter One, he attempts to elucidate the apparent meanings of a group of interrelated *āyāt*. Immediately after the exposition Ṭabāṭabā’ī almost always includes a separate section devoted to the various narrations related to the *āyāt*, the *baḥṭh riwā’ī*. In this section Ṭabāṭabā’ī chooses various narrations, generally from the encyclopedic collections of tafsir-related narrations, particularly the Sunni *muḥaddith* Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī’s *al-Durr al-Manthūr* and the Shī’ī *muḥaddith* Hāshim Baḥrānī’s *al-Burhān*. Sometimes the ‘Allāmah adds his own comments, either cautiously affirming or questioning its acceptability according to various standards. These criteria include how closely the narration corresponds with the Qur’anic worldview and tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, the overall coherence and conformity of the hadith to other similar, reliable hadith, and occasionally the usual technical standards of *‘ilm al-rijāl*.² This approach starkly contrasts with the proponents of *tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr* who always incorporate hadith and *riwāyāt* within the main body of their tafsirs, a strong indication that they regard the

¹ *Riwāyāt* here indicates narration in the broadest sense of the term. It can include hadith attributed to the Prophet (and in the Shī’ī view the infallible Imams of his family) or a saying of other prominent early generation Muslims. See ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Faḍlī, *Introduction to Ḥadīth*. Translated by Nazima Virjee. (London: ICAS Press, 2002), 63-6.

² There is definitely an inclusive spirit in Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s hadith selection; he does not reject a hadith merely because it originates from a Sunni collection, nor does he accept a hadith simply because it is found in a Shī’a collection. Occasionally the *baḥṭh riwā’ī* solely consists of narrations from Sunni sources.

hermeneutical position of hadith as equal to the Qur'an.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī states explicitly that his selections are not predominantly dictated by the technical standards of hadith criticism, in particular the evaluation of the reliability of the chain of narrators, or *isnād*.

In general, there is no justification to discard a tradition, or a group of traditions, unless it goes against the Qur'an or definite (*qaṭ'ī*) Sunnah, or the marks of lie and forgery are stamped on it. However, when it comes to the basic religious knowledge and fundamental beliefs, the only thing accepted as [primary] proof is the Book of Allah and the authentic traditions of the Prophet and definite Sunnah.³

To appreciate how markedly divergent this approach is from previous methodologies, his approach should be compared with the myriad proponents of *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* from both the Shī'ī and Sunnis who place hadith, or more typically *riwāyāt*, containing the exegetical opinions of the *salaf*, as the actual pillar of their hermeneutics.⁴ The reason for this de-emphasis of the technical validity of individual hadith becomes apparent when we consider Ṭabāṭabā'ī's overall methodology and his emphasis on the Qur'an as a sufficient expositor of its core teachings, encapsulated in the verse: "We have sent down the Book

³ M 1:288.

⁴ There is, however, a significant difference between the approaches of the Akhbāris and their Ahl al-Ḥadīth counterparts, most recently the Salafis, towards hadith verification. The Akhbāris were actually less concerned with *isnād* research than their Uṣūlī Shī'ī counterparts; many Akhbāris accepted the authenticity of everything in the four essential books of Shī'ī hadith and sometimes questioned the value of *'ilm al-rijāl*. The Salafis, as compared to other Sunni groups, tend to be inordinately critical of much of the six essential books of Sunni hadith and spend much effort arguing over *isnāds*. One recent example is Nāṣir al-Dīn Albānī who documents in a series of works all those hadith which in his view are either weak or authentic. The unifying factor between these two groups, however, is their over-reliance on and superficial reading of largely solitary hadith to elucidate complex exegetical topics that in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view require further scholarly *ijtihād*.

to you as a clarification of all things.”⁵ This point will be elaborated later in this chapter as well as in Chapter Six.

The Definite Sunnah

Another reason for this lack of emphasis becomes clear when we look at what Ṭabāṭabā’ī considers what is and what is not part of “the definite Sunnah.” According to most of the Sunni and Shī’ī scholars, there is more than one way to establish the provenance (*ithbāt al-ṣudūr*) of a hadith, namely how to ensure that it is taken from an infallible source. Although establishing the reliability of the chain of narrators is a well known way to authenticate hadith, in many of the Islamic sciences it is questionable whether such hadith automatically serve as a proof (*ḥujjah*).⁶ There is a long-standing debate in *uṣūl al-fiqh* whether an authentic solitary hadith (*ḵabar al-wāḥid*)⁷ is sufficient for either proving a primary matter related to *uṣūl al-dīn* or deriving the secondary laws of the Shariah. The Uṣūlīs, the ‘Allāmah included, argued that a solitary hadith does not in itself engender certainty (*ghayr qaṭ’ī*). However, in matters that require unquestioning imitation (*taqlīd*), like the secondary laws of the Shariah or in any of the “particulars” (*juz’iyyāt*)⁸ of religion, there are strong rational and textual proofs that it is a reliable

⁵ Q 16:89.

⁶ The fact that the technical validity of hadith is but one factor in accepting or rejecting it as a proof text has been almost completely neglected in the secondary literature on hadith. One noteworthy exception is Wael Hallaq, “The Authenticity of Prophetic *Ḥadīth*: A Pseudo-Problem,” *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 75-90.

⁷ A solitary hadith is one not reaching the level of “multiple successive transmission” (*tawātur*), meaning that even if it has been transmitted by reliable narrators it does not automatically give certainty that it originated from an infallible source. See al-Faḍlī, *Introduction to Ḥadīth*, 93-105.

⁸ Other examples of the particulars of religion are the details of the afterlife and the specific names and attributes of the prophets and their successors. A rational proof for the validity of narrations of probable origin in practical matters is the “practice of the reasonable” (*sīrat al-‘uqalā’ī*) which says “in human beings day to day activities practical reason usually pays heed to things that have high probability and things that have great importance, even though they may not have high probability [of disclosing actual external

conjecture (*ẓann mu'tabar*) and acceptable as a proof. As Ṭabāṭabā'ī himself says “the probative force (*hujjiyah*) of a solitary hadith is specific to the positive laws and is meant to establish a legal ruling. In topics other than the positive laws [of the Shariah], like creedal matters (*aqā'id*), it [by itself] has no probative force [by itself] even though its chain of narration may be technically correct (*ṣaḥīḥ al-sanad*).”⁹ Since most of the topics dealt with in tafsir are primary issues dealing with *uṣūl al-dīn*, requiring thought and verification (*tahqīq*), solitary hadith do not by themselves avail the exegete of assured knowledge in explaining the apparent meanings of the Qur'an. From the viewpoint of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*, relying on the solitary narrations of the *salaf* is really a concealed form of *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*.

Even if it is argued that the solitary hadith engender knowledge in all areas, as some *muhaddithīn* claim, it is still the case that the validity of the Sunnah depends on the authenticity and coherence of the Qur'an. The inimitability of the Qur'an, both in its content and form, is the main proof for prophecy, not vice versa. Besides the rational proofs which affirm that the Qur'an is the standard for the Sunnah, and not the inverse, there are a number of narrations from the Imams of the Prophet's family that the Qur'an is the standard for verifying hadith. In *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, for example, there is a section “taking hold of the Sunnah, and the evidences of the Book” which contains a number of hadith to the effect that any single hadith which conflicts with the Book of Allah is forged (*zukhruf*) and must be thrown away.¹⁰

reality]”. Jawādī Āmulī, *Commentary on Theistic Proofs*. Translated by Hasan Aliyari. (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2002), 39.

⁹ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Rukhshād, *Dar Maḥzar-i 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī*. (Qum: Intishārāt-i Nahavāndī, 1370 SH), 238.

¹⁰ Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf li-l-Maṭbū'āt, 1419/1998), 1:123; and *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 1:8-9. Ṭabāṭabā'ī calls these hadith *mutawātir* in *Qur'ān dar*

Historically the emphasis of both Sunni and Shī‘ī scholars on *fiqh istidlālī* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* have led them to focus on how the principles of establishing the provenance of hadith can be used in deriving legal *fatāwā*, the positive laws governing a Muslim’s outward, mundane life. If we posit Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s goal in *al-Mizān* to be the derivation of the Qur’anic laws, gained from the apparent meanings of its verses, governing a Muslim’s inward, spiritual life, then it becomes clear he makes use of the aforementioned hadith methodology in a way suitable to his hermeneutics. What is important to note is that Ṭabāṭabā’ī is not arguing that because many narrations are solitary and cannot give the required certainty in exegesis, they should be therefore discarded altogether. It is true that in and of themselves such narrations are not binding, but in the light of the Qur’an and proper tafsir, they are valuable. Solitary hadith can act as supporting evidence (*shāhid*) for the primary evidence (*dalīl*) obtained from tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, in which case their technical status is not a vital matter.

This broad yet considered reevaluation of the role of hadith in tafsir is an essential component in Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s scholarly ijtihad and renewal in tafsir. As mentioned in the last chapter, the different methodological issues which he raises could be seen collectively as the components of a new *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, in the same way that the Uṣūlīs over the last two centuries have reformulated *uṣūl al-fiqh* in opposition to the Akhbārīs. Although Ṭabāṭabā’ī does not explicitly say so in *al-Mizān*, it is clear from some of his students that there is an urgent need for the reevaluation and renewal of the foundational

Islām, 79. Interestingly, this hadith is not found in any of the prominent Sunni collections, and although a few of the classical Sunni scholars accepted in theory the principle that the Qur’an is the standard for solitary hadith, like Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (Legarde, *Index du Grande commentaire*, 34), others disputed the idea. For example, the prominent *mufasssīr* Qurtubī (d. 671/1273) rejected the hadith of “evaluating hadith by the Qur’an” as “invalid and without source” and ‘Abd al-Razzāq Mahdī, the Salafī editor, agrees that it is “fabricated” (*mawḍū‘*). Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*. Edited by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī. 10 vols. (Beruit: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1420/1999), 1:73.

principles of all the Islamic sciences besides *fiqh*. This is a noteworthy matter which will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Technical Obstacles

There are a number of other technical problems with using hadith as a primary source of exegesis. The bulk of narrations found in the Sunni tafsirs are mostly *riwāyāt* attributed to the companions and successors, not hadith related by an infallible source.¹¹ Even if one accepts the claim that the early generations succeeding the Prophet were more knowledgeable about the Qur'an than those who came after them, there remains the difficulty of verifying the technical authenticity of those narrations. Ṭabāṭabā'ī quotes the famous saying of Ibn Ḥanbal that there are three types of hadith, of which one is tafsir, which have no authentic source (*aṣḥ*), as well as the opinion of Imam Shāfi'ī that out of the hundreds of tafsir-related opinions attributed to Ibn 'Abbās perhaps only a hundred are reliable.¹² Moreover, he argues that the contradictions and discrepancies in them, sometimes even in the narrations attributed to the same person, as well their general superficial content, are strong indications that they are the product of their own personal *ijtihād*, which only binds them. As he puts it forcefully:

Taking this approach- namely confining ourselves to what has been narrated from the early generations of exegetes like the companions and their students- necessitates halting the march of knowledge (*tawaffuq al-'ilm fī sayrihi*) and the complete invalidation of fresh research, as can be seen from the explanations transmitted to us from the early scholars and first books of exegesis. Nothing is

¹¹ A glance at any volume of the first and arguably most significant Sunni *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*, Abū Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, demonstrates this.

¹² Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Qur'ān dar Islām*, 68-9.

found in them but superficial and simple concepts devoid of deep research and subtle ideas-where can we find [in these *riwāyāt*] the vast knowledge indicated in the saying of the Exalted: ‘We have revealed the Book to *you* as a clarification of everything’¹³...the truth of the matter is the path to comprehending the Qur’an [without relying on *riwāyāt*] is not closed, and the Divine Exposition and the Wise Reminder by itself is its own path of guidance¹⁴

Turning specifically to the Shī‘ī hadith Ṭabāṭabā‘ī comments that while the narrations attributed to an infallible source are more available than Sunni sources, both in terms of quantity and quality, there are still obstacles in utilizing it as the foundation of tafsir. First, because the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt were forsaken and persecuted during the generations after the Prophet most of their hadith was lost. In support of this claim, the author of *al-Mīzān* points to the paucity of narrations, especially in exegetical matters, narrated from the Imams in the Sunni hadith books.¹⁵ Secondly, most of the available narrations, besides being *āḥād* and therefore of uncertain provenance, are neither directed at the general meaning of the verses nor cover every instance where exegesis is required. For example, in the most comprehensive Shī‘ī collection of tafsir-related hadith, *al-Burhān*, there are many *āyāt* which simply do not have any accompanying *riwāyāt*, nor do the available *riwāyāt* clearly point to the apparent meanings of the *āyāt*, rather they may be pointing to one of its applications (*taṭbīq*) or inner meaning (*bāṭin*). This practice of the Infallibles of not providing a complete and final tafsir is itself a reason why the Qur’an must provide the first basis for exegetical *ijtihād*.

¹³ Q 16:89.

¹⁴ M 3:99.

¹⁵ M 5:280-2.

Other difficulties in the hadith of the Infallibles include the intended signification of those texts, their *dalālah*. In the hadith as well as the Qur'an there are statements which are completely clear and unambiguous (*naṣṣ*), others which are open to two equal valid interpretations (*mujmaḥ*), and finally many with two possibilities where one is more likely (*zāhir*). The Infallibles also employed much symbolic, metaphorical and allusive language to explain the elevated Qur'anic realities.¹⁶ Another problem, specific to the Shī'ī texts, is the statements of the Imams made under precautionary dissimulation (*taqīyah*) which do not reflect their actual beliefs. Furthermore, the Prophet and the Imams spoke to different audiences according to their various capabilities, as they themselves explicitly mentioned.¹⁷ All these factors make it practically unfeasible to use hadith as the foundation for Qur'anic hermeneutics.

Two Problematic Hadith Genres

As a specific example of the technical problems affiliated with utilizing the hadith as a primary exegete, Ṭabāṭabā'ī mentions the hadith concerning so-called “occasions of revelation” (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Most of the *mufasssīrīn* have paid close attention to these hadith and *riwāyāt* which are related to the historical events said to be the cause or occasion of the revelation of various Qur'anic verses. Suyūṭī, highlighting the importance of these hadith from the viewpoint of *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*, quotes the early hadith authority Wāḥidī Nisābūrī to the effect that “it is not possible to have knowledge of the tafsir of the Qur'anic verses without understanding the story behind them and clarifying their occasion of revelation,” and even more explicitly another minor scholar

¹⁶ M 2:31.

¹⁷ For example the well known Prophetic hadith “Verily we prophets have been commanded to speak to people according to the capacity of their intellects.” al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, 1:67.

opines that “explaining the occasions of revelation is a firm path to comprehending the meanings of the Qur’an.”¹⁸ Again, Ṭabāṭabā’ī points out that in addition to the fact that these hadith are generally of uncertain provenance, their contents contradict one another, and often they barely conform to the apparent meaning of the verse. They are generally closer to what Ṭabāṭabā’ī calls “application” (*tatbiq*) of the verse to specific historical events occurring during the Prophet’s lifetime or the early days of Islam.

...they (the companions of the Prophet and their students) used to figuratively report the occasions of revelation of some verses using stories and circumstances which occurred during the Prophet’s time and which had some relevance to the contents of those noble verses, even though that verse is not particularly directed at that particular story or event...there is no reason to rely [on the *asbāb al-nuzūl*], in the likes of these *sūrahs* [Sūrat al-A‘nām] which were revealed at one time for any more than revealing a certain kind of connection between that verse and certain circumstances which occurred during the Prophet’s lifetime. This is especially the case considering the widespread fabrication, interpolation and [technical] weakness found in them, as well as the leniency with which the ancient [hadith scholars] took them and narrated them.¹⁹

One example among many of *asbāb al-nuzūl* hadith which the ‘Allāmah cites as obstructing the vision of the exegete is the story of Abraham in Sūrat al-An‘ām.²⁰ In this story Abraham disputes with his tribe over polytheism by pointing out how the various natural objects which they worship are transient and not worthy of devotion. Ṭabāṭabā’ī remarks that the intended meaning of Abraham’s speech will become clear if we deeply

¹⁸ al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1:61.

¹⁹ M 7:112-3; Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Qur’ān dar Islām*, 146-49.

²⁰ Q 6:74-83.

contemplate (*tadabbarnā*) the Qur’anic language of Abraham, emptying our minds of the grossly contradictory details found in the narrations, and disabusing ourselves of the protracted debates preoccupying past *mufasssīrīn*- the result of erroneously mixing into their exegesis pseudo-historical tales.²¹

Another example is the story of Hārūt and Mārūt in Sūrat al-Baqarah.²² The ‘Allāmah mentions some of the many fanciful interpretations given for each part of the story and muses that if all these proposed explanations were compounded they would yield some 60,000 misunderstandings. Again, the lack of exegetical clarity is largely due to the inordinate amount of attention paid to opinions and fabricated narrations and a lack of focus on the verses themselves.²³

Another problematic field is the *faḍā’il al-suwar*. These narrations describe the rewards of a believer for reciting the *sūrah* or *āyah* in question. Unlike previous *mufasssīrīn* who habitually included such *riwāyāt* in their tafsirs, Ṭabāṭabā’ī does not. Again, besides the technical problems with these hadith (they are infamous amongst the hadith experts as being rife with fabrications),²⁴ the fact is that their contents are more often than not irrelevant to tafsir, namely uncovering the apparent meanings of the Qur’anic verses. Instead of citing these *faḍā’il* hadith, Ṭabāṭabā’ī often remarks at the beginning of a *sūrah* that certain of its verses are “preeminent” (*ghurrah*) and represent foundational Qur’anic teachings.²⁵ Since the *āyāt al-ghurar* are key to understanding

²¹ M 7:171.

²² Q 2:102-3.

²³ M 2:230-1.

²⁴ It is important to note that although Ṭabāṭabā’ī nowhere in *al-Mīzān* endorses these hadith; neither does he reject them outright, like some traditionalists and modernists. His attitude is one of precaution.

²⁵ *Ghurrah* literally means “the white spot on a horse’s head” and figuratively refers to something outstanding. See, for example, Muḥammad Ibn Manẓur, *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Edited by ‘Alī Shīrī. 19 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ Turāth al-‘Arabī. 1408/1988), 10:43-4. Since for Ṭabāṭabā’ī the issue is not that some

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's vision of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, they will be examined further in Chapter Six.

An Encompassing Vision

Besides the aforementioned technical issues the underlying reason for Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hermeneutical shift of the role of hadith from a primary to secondary position derives from his views of the goal and message of the Qur'an itself. In Ṭabāṭabā'ī's eyes the Qur'an is a unique book of guidance touching on the core spiritual issues from man's origin to return, or from God back to God. It is not an ordinary book of stories, history or law, rather its main purpose is to guide humanity away from its base tendencies towards God consciousness, or "a Book We have sent down to *you* that *you* may bring mankind out from darkness into light."²⁶ At the heart of the Qur'anic message is the vision of the absolute oneness (*tawḥīd*) of God in His Essence, Attributes, and Acts. As elaborated in Chapter Six, the 'Allāmah believes every Qur'anic teaching reverts to *tawḥīd*, and it is appropriate that it should remain the exegetical focal point. However, *tawḥīd* is first and foremost a rational doctrine, not founded on pure obedience (*ta'abbud*).²⁷ It cannot be taken blindly even from an infallible authority. The role of the Qur'an and Sunnah is to give the general direction (*irshād*) to this foundational teaching. For this reason alone it is not sufficient to rely on the solitary traditions to elucidate the *zāhir al-āyāt*.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī would not explicitly say that previous *mufasssīrīn* denied that the

are outstanding and others not, rather the *ghurar* verses play a more pivotal role in elucidating its worldview than others, so the term has been approximately translated here as "preeminent" verses.

²⁶ Q 14:1.

²⁷ M 5:318.

Qur'an is a complete, perfect, and eternal book of divine guidance, but in his view it is hard to find this belief in their hadith and grammar dependent hermeneutics. Implicit in their exegetical practice is the idea that the Qur'an should be read in an atomistic way or through the lens of their specialization. While discussing this problem of excessive reliance on hadith in exegesis throughout the intellectual history of Islam, the author of *al-Mizān* laments: "on the outside precedence was given to the Qur'an, but in reality practical usage was reserved for the hadith; as a result the Qur'an was practically abandoned."²⁸ Ṭabāṭabā'ī is asking the reader to examine the existing tafsirs and seriously question whether they are more of an assertion of the grammatical, legal and hadith scholarship of the exegete or truly an explanation of the apparent meanings of the Qur'anic verses, especially its encompassing vision of *tawḥīd*. *Tafsīr bi-l-riwāyāt*, despite its popularity, is an unbalanced methodology which fails to achieve the goal of proper tafsir.

Certainly Ṭabāṭabā'ī was aware that the strict traditionalists would protest that his methodology fails to give due importance to hadith and the Prophet's role as the first teacher of the Qur'an. Anticipating such a reaction, Ṭabāṭabā'ī replies in the prologue of *al-Mizān* to this misconception. He strongly affirms that indeed God has made the Prophet the supreme student and teacher of His revelation, as affirmed by the verses: "and We have sent down the reminder to *you* so that *you* may clarify for the people..." and "he teaches them the Book and wisdom"²⁹ and the Ahl al-Bayt also fulfills this role according to the following Prophetic hadith. "Verily I am leaving for you two weighty things (*thaqalyan*) which if you hold fast to them you will never go astray after me; the

²⁸ Q 25:30; M 5:280

²⁹ Q 16:44, 62:2.

Book of God and my progeny, the people of my house. The two will never separate until they return to me at the cistern.”³⁰ Additionally, Qur’anic verses speak of their spiritual purification, such as, “Verily God only intends to rid you of all impurities, People of the House, and purify you completely.”³¹

After affirming all these premises Ṭabāṭabā’ī points out that “the Prophet and the Imams from his progeny always used this method [tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an] as can be seen in the traditions which have been narrated from them on exegesis, some of which will be quoted in this book in their appropriate place.” In other words, the fact that the Prophet and his successors are authoritative expositors of the details of the law and “divine teachers” of the Qur’an in no way contradicts that others can fathom its apparent meanings by “putting into practice the good taste (*salīqah*) learnt from [the Qur’an’s] true teachers.”³² Ṭabāṭabā’ī also describes the ability to perform tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an as an “acquired taste” (*dhawq muktasab*) obtained by “training by means of the reports (*āthār*) narrated from the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt.”³³ The implication is that the methodology of placing the Qur’an as the first source of exegesis does not contradict the value of the Sunnah; rather the latter supports or even demands it. Drawing upon the hadith themselves to deflate the arguments of the strict *muḥaddithīn* who contest sound *ijtihād* in tafsir is a common tactic of Ṭabāṭabā’ī and his students. This is also the case with his defense of philosophy and mysticism, as will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five, respectively.

³⁰ The *thaqalayn* hadith, with the inclusion of the Ahl al-Bayt alongside the Book of Allah, is found in many of the prominent Sunni collections, such as Muslim, Tirmidhī, Nasā’ī, Ibn Mājah and Ibn Ḥanbal.

³¹ M 3: 98; Q 16: 44, 2: 188, 33: 33.

³² Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Qur’ān dar Islām*, 30.

³³ M 3:101.

Modernist Excess

At the same time Ṭabāṭabā'ī did not accept the excessive criticism of some modernists who reject arbitrarily sections of the authentic Sunnah merely because they might contravene current trends. In this regard he was critical particularly of the tafsir, *al-Manār*, by Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935).³⁴

Some people, especially those in our time who are immersed in material discussions and are overawed by modern western civilization, have made an ill-conceived conclusion from the above fact [that some tradition are clearly fabrications] and throw away all of the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah and the comprehensive collections of narrations. This is one extreme. Opposed to this group are the traditionalists (*al-akhbārīyīn wa aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*), al-Ḥarūrīyah³⁵ and others who go to the other extreme of accepting every *riwāyah* without any scrutiny whatsoever.³⁶

Ṭabāṭabā'ī again refers to this balance in hadith criticism while commenting on hadith which refer to the descent of the Black Stone from Paradise. One of the repeated points in *al-Mizān* is that everything found in the material realm also exists in a more real way in immaterial realms, called in the Islamic texts '*ālam al-ghayb* or *malakūt*. This reality was alluded to in the previous chapter concerning Ṭabāṭabā'ī's approach to one of his frequently quoted verses: "There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a fixed measure." There are a number of hadith which also point to this reality, such as that the Black Stone presently embedded in the Ka'bah

³⁴ There is an abundance of secondary literature on 'Abduh, Riḍā, and *Tafsīr al-Manār*. See for example J.J.G Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974).

³⁵ The Ḥarūrīyah are a defunct sect of the Khawārij. Why Ṭabāṭabā'ī believed they haphazardly accepted hadith is unclear.

³⁶ M 2:237.

descended from heaven, or the *āyāt* which say that a person's deeds will literally appear in embodied forms in the next life, although the author of *al-Manār* rejects them as fabrications. This is because in his view the importance of these otherwise ordinary materials is merely due to their high esteem from God and the Muslims, not anything intrinsic to their origin.³⁷ The root problem of the Muslim modernists in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view is more than their ill-informed rejection of some hadith. Knowingly or unknowingly, they are materialists. Theirs is a philosophical problem, an inability to accept the existential vastness of reality affirmed in the Qur'an and divine philosophy. One of the Allāmah's significant contributions to tafsir as well as the contemporary *hawzah* is the identification of the principal misunderstanding of both the strict *muḥaddithīn* and the modernists arising from a crypto-materialistic worldview.

Although the approach of *tafsīr bi-l-riwāyāt* has not been the only path taken by the classical *mufasssīrīn*, those relatively few scholars who strayed from it, particularly the theologians, philosophers and mystics, were accused of *ra'y*. Ṭabāṭabā'ī concurs with these critics if they intended that preconceived theories, however true they may be in of themselves, cannot be imposed on the Qur'an and labeled tafsir. But if they meant that reasoning and *ijtihād* have no role in proper exegesis then they and the author of *al-Mīzān* differ sharply. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view on the exegetical role of reasoning and philosophy will be examined in the next chapter.

³⁷ Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm (al-Shahīr bi-Tafsīr al-Manār)*. 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 1:477; M 1:287.

Chapter Four: Philosophical and Qur'anic Realities

The Significance of Divine Philosophy

The place of philosophy (*falsafah*) among the religious sciences has been a thorny issue in Islamic intellectual history since the first translations of Aristotle and other Greek philosophers into Arabic during the first or second century of the Hijrah. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, as perhaps the most eminent Shī'ī philosopher of recent times, views philosophy, or more specifically demonstrative rational proofs (*barāhīn 'aqliyah*), as one of the essential resources at the disposal of an exegete, somewhat in the same way as the various other *'ulūm al-tafsīr*, such as language, grammar and hadith, or perhaps more essential. At the same time he was aware that philosophy, particularly the elaborate theorizing of the Peripatetics (*Mashshā'iyah*), has had a controversial and often tortured path in the intellectual history of Islam, a point which he concedes in *al-Mizān*. Even so, he vigorously defends the use of intellect (*'aql*)¹ in a way rarely seen amongst other exegetes, Sunni or Shī'ī, the vast majority of whose hermeneutics were hadith and grammar-based, and for whom the insertion of philosophical principles in tafsir automatically qualifies it as *ra'y*. At the same time, Ṭabāṭabā'ī certainly did not see his task as writing a tafsir largely based on philosophy; just as in the case of the authentic Sunnah, the rulings of the sound intellect (*'aql salīm*) must always be relegated to an instrumental, not foundational, role.

¹ It should be kept in mind that the word *'aql* has different meanings in different contexts in Islamic thought. Unless otherwise noted, here *'aql* (and its activity, *ta'aqqul*) refers to the particularly human faculty which performs inferential reasoning (*istidlāl*) by means of universal concepts and affirmations (Muḥammad Ridā al-Muẓaffar, *al-Mantiq*. (Tehran: Intirshārāt-i Ilhām, 1377), 22. Ṭabāṭabā'ī defines it as "that by which humans distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, truth and falsehood." M 1: 404.

It is also important to keep in mind what precisely Ṭabāṭabā'ī intended by “philosophy”; it is not arbitrary Hellenistic conjectures artificially brought into Islam.² The heart of philosophy is ratiocination (*ta' aqqul*) and discursive reasoning (*baḥth 'aqlī*) with the intended goal of establishing certain rules (*qawā'id yaqīnīyah*). These rules can be used to illuminate the apparent meanings of the revealed texts as well as the nature of metaphysical realities (*ḥaqā'iq muta'āliyah 'an al-māddah* or *ḥaqā'iq mā warā' al-ṭabī'ah*) explained therein. Ṭabāṭabā'ī explicitly states in the prologue to *al-Mizān* that the Qur'an is undoubtedly not a book of philosophical speculation, especially in the sense that the word philosophy was usually negatively understood amongst the exoteric scholars, namely the Greek-derived metaphysical and physical theories of Ibn Sīnā and the Peripatetics; rather the Qur'an is a book of revealed guidance. But it also undeniably contains profound metaphysical statements about the nature of God as the supreme reality, as well as His names and acts. Beyond this, it repeatedly calls upon its listeners to use their intellects to reflect actively on themselves and creation in order to understand its message, as well as reprimanding those that blindly follow others in their beliefs.³

Philosophy as envisioned by Ṭabāṭabā'ī then is not the same discipline as that practiced by the notorious Peripatetics, who are harshly criticized for their exposition of such obtuse topics as the Ten Intellects or Seven Spheres. As early as the prologue he criticizes them by name because of their imposition of conjectures onto the Qur'an:

² For Ṭabāṭabā'ī and his students, one of the unnecessary sources for the misconceived opposition to reasoning in religion is the negative connotations of the term *falsafah*. This situation is comparable with the previous disputes among the Shī'ī *fuqahā'* over the validity of *ijtihād*. A prominent Akhbārī argument against the Uṣūlīs was that historically the term *ijtihād* had strong associations with *ra'y*. Ṭabāṭabā'ī reprimands those who attack philosophy simply because some of its key figures are Greek, since “truth is truth wherever it may be and however it may come and from whatever place it is taken...” M 5:263.

³ Ṭabāṭabā'ī asserts that there are some 300 Qur'anic verses which encourage the use of intellect and discursive thinking, M 5:260.

As for the philosophers, they fell into the same trap as the theologians amongst the exegetes, getting entangled with “adaptation” (*taṭbīq*) and interpreting verses against their apparent meaning, because of widely accepted views (*musallamāt*)⁴ in the various branches of philosophy (in the broadest meaning of that word, namely mathematics, natural sciences, metaphysics, and practical wisdom)- particularly the Peripatetics. They [the Hellenizing philosophers] twisted the apparent meanings (*ta’awwalū*) of those verses dealing with metaphysical realities, the verses dealing with creation, the genesis of the heavens and earth, the verses dealing with intermediate life (*barzakh*) and the hereafter.⁵

So while Ṭabāṭabā’ī admired Ibn Sīnā’s strong deductive skills, and followed Mullā Ṣadrā in key metaphysical issues, he consciously selected what he believed were the strongest proofs found in what he called interchangeably *falsafat ilāhīyah*, *ḥikmat ilāhīyah* or *baḥth ‘aqlī*. Nor did he hesitate to reject the atheistic pseudo-philosophers (*mutafalsafīn*) who put speculative issues (he specifically mentions Ptolemaic celestial bodies) “in the dress of firmly proven matters. The Dahrīyah⁶ and the like added more invalid opinions like transmigration of souls and the negation of resurrection, particularly the bodily one.”⁷

In another treatise the ‘Allāmah explicitly rejects this type of fanciful speculation as authentic philosophy: “if [what is intended by philosophy] is a well-organized

⁴ *Musallamāt* in traditional logic refers to “widely held beliefs” that are allowed as premises in the “craft of debate” (*ṣan’at al-jadal*) but as not as premises in demonstrative proof (*burhān*), which only accepts “certain premises” (*yaqīnīyāt*). See al-Muzaffar, *al-Mantiq*, 305.

⁵ M 1:9. ‘Āṣī has collected some significant manuscripts attributed to Ibn Sīnā reflecting the Peripatetic approach to tafsir. Ḥasan ‘Āṣī, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur’ānī wa-l-Lughat al-Ṣūfīyah fī Falsafat Ibn Sīnā*. (Beirut: al-Mu’assasat al-Jāmi‘iyat li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Naṣr wa-l-Tawzī’, 1403/1983).

⁶ In the Islamic intellectual tradition al-Dahrīyah is a common derogative label with Qur’anic origins used for irreligious philosophers.

⁷ M 5:285.

collection of opinionated statements (*aqāwīl*) taken from the Greeks and non-Greeks... the point of which is copying or blindly imitating the prominent among them...than it would be better if it did not exist...” Yet the ‘Allāmah strongly negates that this is philosophy. Authentic philosophy comprises “research of realities using deductive reasoning” (*al-baḥth al-istidlālī ‘an-l-ḥaqā’iq*) and is neither concerned with popular opinion nor scholarly consensus (*ijmā’*). The author of *al-Mizān* encourages the reader to “leave these opinions and be certain that religion only calls to divine philosophy, namely attaining divine knowledge through rational proof.”⁸

Specifically turning to Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s own summaries of philosophy, *Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah* and *Niyāhat al-Ḥikmah*, now standard introductory texts in the *ḥawzah*, we see that his aim is to identify precisely and logically demonstrate the core metaphysical issues most germane to both philosophy and theology, particularly well-known ontological and epistemological questions. In the very first line of *Bidāyah* he defines divine philosophy as a discipline which researches existence per se (*al-wujūd bi-mā huwa wujūd*) in order to have cognizance of existents “in a general manner” (*‘alā wajh kullī*) and differentiate it from things that do not truly exist.⁹ In *al-Mizān* ‘Allāmah points out that the term *al-ḥikmah* “is generally used concerning those rational, true and veridical facts (*ma’lūmāt*) which do not accept any invalidity or falsehood whatsoever.”¹⁰ The task of true, divine philosophy is to elucidate foundational metaphysical principles (*al-ilāhīyāt bi-ma’na al-a‘amm*) as an entry point into theology (*al-ilāhīyāt bi-ma’na al-akhaṣṣ*); the difference being that the former relies upon rational proofs (*burhān ‘aqlī*) while the latter

⁸ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *‘Alī wa-l-Falsafat al-Ilāhīyah*. (n.p, al-Dār al-Islāmīyah, n.d.), 14-15.

⁹ Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī, *Sharḥ Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah*. 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 1425/2004), 1:11. At one point in *al-Mizān* ‘Allāmah mentions “the divine philosophical sciences” (*al-ma’ārif al-ilāhīyat al-falsafīyah*), M 1:64.

¹⁰ M 2:395.

draws upon both rational principles and revealed texts. In these two works there is no mention of the infamous topics typically associated with classical philosophy, such as their misplaced use of reason to study the natural sciences (*ṭabī'iyāt*) or elaborate cosmological speculations.¹¹ There is not even discussion of the crucial metaphysical issues of the soul and the hereafter, perhaps because he viewed the philosophers' approach to the question as problematic or inadequate.¹²

So while Ṭabāṭabā'ī had great admiration for Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī and his synthesizing mystical philosophic system, calling him a renewer (*mujaddid*), reviver of Islamic philosophy, and one of the first rank philosophers¹³, he did not indiscriminately make use of every principle of Sadrian philosophy. He chose only the most foundational principles which he believed were based on the strongest proofs, like *aṣālat al-wujūd*, *waḥdat wujūd tashkīkī*, and *'ilm ḥudūrī*.

The *Ḥaqā'iq*

Perhaps the most frequently used term in *al-Mizān* encompassing those topics which form the basis for authentic, or divine philosophy (*ḥikmat ilāhīyah*) is “the realities” (*ḥaqā'iq*).¹⁴ One way to understand the nature of the realities is by contrasting them with their opposite, “the constructs” (*i'tibārīyāt*)¹⁵ *I'tibārīyāt* are those topics which are mentally posited and conventional in nature, for example social laws and cultural practices (*nawāmiṣ wa qawānīn*); in contrast the *ḥaqā'iq* exist regardless of human

¹¹ Of course Ṭabāṭabā'ī frequently argues that it is just as misplaced to expect modern science to answer philosophical and religious questions, a topic that will be examined in the next chapter.

¹² Algar (2006), 335-6.

¹³ Tihirānī, *Mīhr-i Tābān*, 27-8. The other philosophers he places in this category are Ibn Sīnā and Farābī.

¹⁴ According to a computer search of *al-Mizān* the word *ḥaqīqah* and its plural *ḥaqā'iq* have been used in every volume, usually dozens of times, and more than 800 times in the entire work.

¹⁵ Ṭabāṭabā'ī wrote a treatise *fi-l-I'tibārīyāt* in Najaf. Kirmānī, *Kitābsināshī-yi 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, xx.

existence or acts. Describing the sharp difference between the two he says:

There is no doubt that there are two types of knowledge and general affirmations (*taṣdīqāt*) that we rely upon. The first consist of the knowledge and affirmations which have no natural relation to our actions, but are only affirmations which reveal reality and the external world, regardless of whether we and our daily individual and social acts exist or no; for example the affirmative statements that the number four is even, two is half of one, and that the world exists....the second type of knowledge and affirmations consists of the practical knowledge and conventional and posited statements which we have contrived for practical purposes in our daily life.

As an example of a construct Ṭabāṭabā'ī mentions the position of political leadership (*riyāṣah*). If we say Zayd is president it is because people consider him so (*yatī'birūhu*), in reality the attribute of president is only a conventional one. Other attributes, such as his height or skin color, possess objective reality regardless of popular opinion. The only reason we give validity to such contrived concepts such as president, or any other social position, is for the sake of maintaining society. "The belief that Zayd is a head [of a society] or president is something that only exists in imagination; it does not cross those bounds into the external world, except that we give it the value of a real external concept for the benefit of society (*na'tabirūhu ma'nān khārijan li-maṣlaḥat al-ijtimā'*)."¹⁶

The first task of a philosopher is to investigate realities, not constructs, using the tool of firm rational proofs, as a guide Islamic philosophy, described by its proponents as

¹⁶ M 8:54.

divine wisdom. It differs from sophistry in that it acknowledges reality as something existing outside the mind, and that knowledge of objective reality is possible. But it sharply diverges from materialism in its strong affirmation of metaphysical realities.¹⁷ Being primarily a book of tafsir it is not surprising that there is such no detailed definition of *falsafah* in *al-Mizān*, although at one point he says in passing “philosophy researches real matters (*baḥṭh ḥaqīqī*) and, by means of certain premises (*muqaddimāt yaqīnīyah*), establishes demonstrative proofs for well-known topics (*masā’il musallamah*).”¹⁸

A recurring theme of *al-Mizān* is that the *ḥaqā’iq* which the Qur’an presents are metaphysically, not mentally nor materially, grounded, and therefore conform on a conceptual level, although not always on a linguistic level, to the realities discovered in divine philosophy. In the language of philosophy and *’irfān* they are *wujūdī* and *takwīnī*, integral parts of creation and existence. For example he says the verse “Allah makes clear to you so that you may reflect/ on this life and the next” (Q 2:19-20) “encourages research on the realities of existence (*ḥaqā’iq al-wujūd*)...” (M 2:201), or God’s elevating some of the prophets by degrees (Q 2:253) is a “real and actual affair, not mentally constructed” (*amr ḥaqīqī wāqī’ī ghayr i’tibārī*), neither imaginary (*wahmī*) nor contrived (*wad’ī*).¹⁹ In general all the fundamental principles of religion discussed in the Qur’an, specifically *tawḥīd*, prophecy and resurrection, are metaphysical realities, discussed in divine philosophy under the titles “the origin and the return” (*mabdā’ wa ma’ād*), “causation” (*’illīyah*), and “psychology” (*’ilm al-nafs*).

A further point necessary to understand properly the Qur’anic and philosophical

¹⁷ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tabātabā’ī, *Usus al-Falsafah wa-l-Madḥhab al-Wāqī’ī*. 2 vols. *Scholia* by Murtaḍā Muṭaḥḥarī. (Beirut: Dār al-Ta’aruf li-l Maṭbū’āt, 1408/1988), 1:60-4. This is the Arabic translation by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mun’im al-Khānqānī of the Persian original, unavailable to the present writer.

¹⁸ M 5:265.

¹⁹ M 2:320.

ḥaqā'iq is that they are ontologically gradated. There are a number of important topics in *al-Mīzān* in which the 'Allāmah emphasizes the gradated nature of metaphysical realities, taking for granted that *aṣālat al-wujūd al-tashkīkī* is a proven rational principle at the disposal of a serious exegete. In a discussion concerning God's "coming" he explains that a correct understanding of the concept "is one of the Qur'anic realities which discursive philosophy (*abḥāth burhānīyah*) did not succeed in attaining except after much deep reflection and many ups and downs, and after the establishment of the [Sadrian] principle of 'gradation in the primary real existence' (*tashkīk fī-l-ḥaqīqat al-wujūdīyah al-aṣlīyah*)."²⁰ Criticizing an unnamed objector who appears to regard the differences between prophets and ordinary believers as a conventional affair, he replies: "this objection is based upon principles of hermeneutics (*uṣūl maslak al-tafsīr*) which are against those which a hermeneutics must be based. The objection assumes that the realities of fundamental knowledge (*ḥaqā'iq al-ma'ārif al-aṣlīyah*) are one in terms of their objective reality (*wāqī'*), without any difference in their levels and degrees- the same goes for other spiritual and inner perfections..."²¹

Intelligible Realities

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's other premise concerning the realities is that the intellect can independently comprehend their meaning, if only in a general conceptual manner.²²

Either relying on empirical science, as modernists might espouse, or stopping at the

²⁰ M 2:106.

²¹ M 1:39.

²² That is, intellect fathoms their *mafhūm*, not *miṣdāq*. This is what Hādī Sabzawāri, one of Mullā Ṣadrā's well-known intellectual successors, refers to in his famous description of *wujūd*: "its notion (*mafhūm*) is one of the best-known things, but its deepest reality (*kunh*) is in the extremity of hiddenness". Hādī Sabzawāri, *The Metaphysics of Sabzawari*. Translated by Mehdi Mohaghegh and Toshihiko Izutsu. (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1977), 31.

literal meanings of the revealed texts, as most *muḥaddithīn* advocate, is completely out of place. The ‘Allāmah’s critique of empiricism will be discussed in the next chapter; on the whole it may be said that while he did not negate the epistemic value of scientific experimentation he held that its use is limited to investigating certain aspects of material objects, not metaphysical realities. In Volume Five he presents various objections and responses to the intellect’s ability to understand properly “the apparent meanings of the religious texts” (*ẓawāhir dīnīyah*). Most of these objections seem to come from the strict *muḥaddithīn*, while others are from the empiricists and modernists, although in his typical style he avoids mentioning any specific labels.²³ Just as his defense of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an is based upon proofs from the Qur’an and Sunnah, here too Ṭabāṭabā’ī frequently invokes their authority. “The Noble Qur’an guides the intellect to use what is innately part of its nature to utilize and to take the path it is familiar with and which it naturally knows, namely arranging known [premises] to infer unknown [premises].”²⁴

Criticizing the *muḥaddithīn* who uncritically quote opinions and dubious hadith even when they are glaringly illogical, he says:

Allah, the Immaculate, did not invalidate the probative force (*ḥujjah*) of intellect in His Book. How could He when its probative force depended upon intellect. He did not make binding the opinions of the companions, their students and the like, considering the glaring discrepancies found in them. He neither called us to sophistry by accepting contradictory and conflicting opinions, nor called us to

²³ Ṭabāṭabā’ī describes a typical objection of the Akhbārīs and the Ahl al-Ḥadīth in the following manner: “the way of the pious ancestors was completely distinct from the way of philosophy and mysticism; they contented themselves with the Book and Sunnah to the exclusion of logical and rational principles like the philosophers and the way of purification like the mystics.” M 5:264.

²⁴ M 5:272.

anything but careful reflection (*tadabbur*) on His Book, so any apparent inconsistencies might be resolved.²⁵

Careful reflection, then, by its very nature means the use of intellect and rational principles. It cannot arbitrarily be disposed of even if some *muḥaddithīn* so desire. Again, the point is that the way of intellect is in no way opposed to the authoritative teachings of Islam; rather its core tenets are inseparable from those teachings. This is known in contemporary parlance of the *ḥawzah* as the inseparability of ‘*aql* and *shar’*, or Qur’an and *burhān*.

The Sound Intellect

Intellect, articulated in the axiomatic rules of traditional logic, is therefore the most readily accessible standard for studying the Qur’anic and philosophical realities. Sound intellect, sound in the sense that it is free from the banes of personal caprices and fallacious premises, independently affirms the three foundational Qur’anic principles of *tawḥīd*, prophecy, and resurrection. During an explanation of the verse “We do not punish [any community] until We have sent [it] an apostle.”²⁶ Ṭabāṭabā’ī disputes a common view that it proves the *kalām* and *fiqh* rule “the abhorrence of punishment in the absence of [revealed] declaration” (*qubḥ al-‘iqāb bi-la bayān*).²⁷ This is because intellect on its own (*‘aql mustaqill*) can perceive validity of *uṣūl al-dīn* “without being dependent on any prophecy or [divine] message”²⁸ However, if intellect is overwhelmed by desires and personal whims it will become unhealthy and unstable. In Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s view this is a

²⁵ M 1:9.

²⁶ Q 17:15.

²⁷ For a brief discussion of the rule and arguments against it see al-Ṣadr, *Durūs fī ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*, 1:132-3.

²⁸ M 17:15.

key reason why the Qur'an so much emphasizes piety and purification of the self, without in any way negating the value of reason.²⁹ That the mystical path does not negate but rather complements the intellectual path is an important point which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Besides proving by means of logic the basic concepts of religion and philosophy, intellect in the view of Ṭabāṭabā'ī and his students also plays an essential role in arbitrating among apparently conflicting transmitted texts, especially those of a metaphorical or symbolic nature like the *mutashābihat*. He makes an interesting comparison between the necessity of the study of logic and rational principles to understand the meanings of Qur'anic concepts on the one hand and the requirement of studying the Arabic language to grasp the basic meanings of the Qur'anic vocabulary on the other: "...no one has said that since the Qur'an leads to the utilization of logical principles it is therefore incumbent on every Muslim to learn [traditional] logic. But the very utilization of these principles is something from which there is no escape. So the opponents of logic are not unlike the person who say [that since] the objective of the Qur'an is to lead us to the goals of religion we are not obliged to learn its language, which is a legacy of the times of pagan ignorance (*jāhiliyah*)."³⁰ Reasoning is part of human nature (*ṭabī'ī*) and it plays an important role in religion since God has used it in His Book, as well as the Prophet and Imams in their Sunnah. Even for those particular issues the underlying cause (*'illah*) of which can never be fathomed purely rationally, like the positive laws of the Shariah, intellect still plays a critical role in illuminating the

²⁹ M 5:272.

³⁰ M 5:270.

social benefits of those laws.³¹ A competent philosopher, however, distinguishes between firm demonstrative proofs and specious arguments (*mughālaṭāt*), just as a careful exegete differentiates between the *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses, or a master hadith scholar separates authentic from fabricated hadith.³²

‘*Aql* and *naql* therefore are not opposing but complimentary forces, intellect without revelation is like having a lamp but not knowing the right path to travel, while revelation without intellect is like walking on the right path on a dark night.³³ In the words of a prominent student of the ‘Allāmah and a contemporary faqih, Fāḍil Lankarānī: “there is no doubt that the ruling of certain intellect (‘*aql qaṭ‘ī*) and its definite perception (*idrākuhu al-jazmī*) are part of those things which constitute the foundational principles of tafsir (*uṣūl al-tafsīr*).”³⁴ This means that if the certain rulings of the intellect conflict with the conjectural apparent meanings of revelation then the former acts, in the terminology of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, as a “connected verbal evidence” (*qarīnat lafzīyat muttasīlah*)³⁵ which qualifies the apparent meaning.

Reasoning through the Tradition

Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s positive and inclusive view of the role of intellect in religion has strong roots in the Shī‘ah intellectual tradition, even among those scholars who had little patience with the elaborate theorizing of the philosophers. Shī‘ī scholars of a philosophic bent have pointed to the relatively well established position of the complementary roles

³¹ M 5:260.

³² M 5: 263

³³ This simile is frequently invoked by Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s students and is found in a hadith of Imam ‘Alī. Kassār, *al-Manhaj al-‘Aqā’idī*, 38.

³⁴ Muḥammad Fāḍil Lankarānī, *Madkhal al-Tafsīr*. <<http://www.lankarani.ir/ara/index.php>>, 197.

³⁵ For a concise discussion of *qarīnat lafzīyah muttasīlah* see al-Ṣadr, *Durūs fi ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*, 1:105-6.

of *'aql* and *naql* in Shī'ī *kalām* and *fiqh* to give legitimacy to their often maligned discipline. For example, in Shī'ī legal jurisprudence there is the principle called “the rule of correspondence [between reason and revelation]” (*qā'idat al-talāzum*) which according to one prominent Uṣūlī scholar “affirm[s] the impossibility of contradiction between an explicit *shar'ī* text and definite rational evidences.”³⁶ In all Uṣūlī books of theoretical *fiqh* there are extensive discussions on the importance of *'dalīl 'aqlī* in deriving the practical laws. As an eminent Muslim philosopher in his own right, Ṭabāṭabā'ī takes full advantage of the optimistic view of sound reason in the Shī'ī tradition to argue for its active role as a tool of tafsir. Since his approach to the Qur'an is one which puts heavy emphasis on the intellectual ability of the exegete to extract the Qur'anic realities from various verses, obviously connecting those verses, inferring their common themes, and in general identifying their key concepts, is paramount. Indeed, in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view this inferential process of ratiocination is essence of the key Qur'anic concept of “deeply reflecting” (*tadabbur*) on its verses. At times he explicitly puts *ta'aqqul* next to *tadabbur* as synonyms.³⁷ As mentioned in chapter two, implicit in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's renewal and ijtihad in tafsir is a project for the elaboration of a proper *uṣūl al-tafsīr* similar to *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Just like the mujtahid in *fiqh*, the *mufasssīr* must explicitly or implicitly employ some form of rational principles in order to interpret properly the apparent meaning of the religious texts, even if he verbally denies their validity. Therefore, a major foundational principle of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an is the rational rules collectively presented in authentic philosophy.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:148.

³⁷ M 3:96, 5:270, 8:60. Definitely in his view *ta'aqqul* is the heart of *tafakkur*, sound discursive reasoning. See M 5:261 and the discussion “the path of thinking to which the Qur'an guides” (*kalām fī tariq al-tafakkur alladhī yahdī ilayhī al-Qur'ān*), where *tafkīr* is illustrated by the basic syllogisms of classical logic.

Still, some ‘*ulamā*’ have charged that *al-Mizān* is merely “a philosophical tafsir”, an imposition of (*taḥmīl*) philosophy onto the Qur’an, essentially a charge that it is *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*. These accusations would presumably come from those strict traditionalists who would prefer tafsir to consist mainly of hadith and grammatical discussions, and those who do not believe that philosophy has a place amongst the religious disciplines.³⁸ As seen in Chapter Two, Ṭabāṭabā’ī was sensitive to the question of *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*, particularly the core issue of separating invalid ijihād, based on *ra’y*, from valid ijihād, based on *‘ilm*. *Tafsīr bi-l-ra’y* has only been vaguely defined throughout the intellectual history of Islam as exegesis performed without heavy reliance on what are essentially the opinions of the early generations of Muslims. We have seen how Ṭabāṭabā’ī vigorously argued that this method is really a concealed form of *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*. Saying that opinion-based tafsir is condemnable is really saying that tafsir must be done with firm knowledge, not personal opinion, and naturally the question arises, what are the assured sources of knowledge? Obviously the first and unanimously agreed upon source is the Qur’an itself, and the very basis of Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s hermeneutics is that full attention must be paid to the Qur’an as a complete and independent worldview, which through the active reflection (*tadabbur*) of the exegete along with guidance from the authentic Sunnah, explains itself in its general spiritual and ethical teachings. As shown in Chapter Three, the vast majority of traditional exegetes, both Sunni and Shī‘ī, have described the hadith as a secondary source in theory but used it as a primary source in practice, and Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s objections to such an approach have been pointed out. In the

³⁸ Prominent exponents of Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s tafsir methodology mention the existence of such detractors, albeit in the typical *ḥawzah* style without mentioning names, a practice which is considered proper etiquette (*adab*). Although there have been and still are strong critics of philosophy in the *ḥawzah*, their activity can generally be categorized as peripheral. This is mainly due to Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s impact on the intellectual milieu of the *ḥawzah*, which will be examined in Chapter Seven.

Shī'ī intellectual tradition sound reason has also been seen as a definite source of knowledge, not only in the writings of prominent lawyers and theologians, but more importantly in foundational texts such as the prominent collections of hadith containing the authoritative sayings of the twelve Imams. The first section of *al-Kāfī*, the most important of the four primary books of Shī'ī hadith, consists of twenty pages of often lengthy and explicit hadith emphasizing the value of *'aql*.³⁹

“A Philosophical Tafsir”

At the same time Ṭabāṭabā'ī is aware that rational principles, like the other exegetical tool of hadith, can be misused and overwhelm the voice of the Qur'an, leading away from *istināq* and towards *tafsir bi-l-ra'y*. Despite his deep admiration for Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn and his philosophical school, a tafsir like the incomplete one by the Shirazi sage might be described by Ṭabāṭabā'ī as *ḥikmah* applied to tafsir, rather than tafsir of the *zāhir al-āyāt*.⁴⁰ While it cannot be said that for Ṭabāṭabā'ī such writings are necessarily objectionable in and of themselves, rather his criticism would run along the lines that despite the possible value of such writings in other disciplines according to the standards of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an they must be treated as application (*taṭbīq*), not tafsir per se. As we have seen Ṭabāṭabā'ī disagreed with Ṣadrā's style of “mixing topics”; for example, in his philosophical works, Ṣadrā incorporates Ibn 'Arabī style *'irfān*, often quoting directly from the Andalusian gnostic. Even the format of his magnum opus, *al-Asfār al-Arba'a*, is modeled upon the “four spiritual journeys” as presented in practical

³⁹ For example in one lengthy narration from the seventh Imam praising intellect and those who properly employ it, *'aql* is described as God's “inner proof” (*ḥujjat bāṭinah*), complemented by the “outer proof” (*ḥujjat zāhirah*) of the prophets and their designated successors. al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, 1:60.

⁴⁰ Kassār, *al-Manhaj al-'Aqā'idī*, 39.

‘irfān. From Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s point of view Ṣadrā’s tafsir is truly “philosophical”⁴¹, not authentic tafsir in the sense of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an. Ṭabāṭabā’ī preferred the approach of Ṣadrā’s most famous disciple, Fayḍ Kāshānī, who scrupulously separated topics in his works. So while from one point of view Kāshānī’s *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi* is another *tafsīr bi-l-riwāyāt*, and not tafsir per se according to Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s definition, the fact that he generally refrained from mixing into it any extravagant theological or mystical discussions would be a point in its favor.⁴²

A comparison between the tafsirs of Mullā Ṣadrā and Ṭabāṭabā’ī of Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ⁴³ provides a clear example of how their approaches differ; how one could be labeled philosophical tafsir and the other tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an. Ṣadrā prefaces his tafsir with six discussions on issues extraneous to tafsir such as “an explanation of the stages of *tawhīd*”, a detailed analysis of *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, and “on the necessity of speculation on the cognition of God.” While these topics are relevant to Islamic theology, philosophy and mysticism, from Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s hermeneutical view they have no direct relevance to the *ẓāhir al-āyāt* and most be eschewed in a proper tafsir. His preface to the interpretation of the surah is typically direct and restrained, pinpointing its main points in a single extended statement:

The *sūrah* describes Him (the Exalted) as possessing a unified essence, and that everything other than Him turns to Him in all their existential needs without sharing anything with Him, neither in essence, attributes, nor acts-this is the [teaching] of Qur’anic *tawhīd* which is specific to the Noble Qur’an and upon

⁴¹ As he explicitly labels it in *Qur’ān dar Islām*, 63-4.

⁴² According to a general index for *al-Mizān*, the ‘Allāmah cites hadith from Kāshānī’s *al-Ṣāfi* 11 times. M 22:543.

⁴³ Also known as Sūrat al-Tawhīd, Q 112:1-4.

which all Islamic teachings (*ma 'arīf*) are based.⁴⁴

He then adds two more short sentences stating that there are many *riwāyāt* emphasizing the special position of the *sūrah* in the Qur'an, and that it is possibly either a Meccan or a Medinan, before starting the tafsir itself. The main text of Ṣadrā's tafsir, while treating the basic meanings of each verse, also contains numerous digressions that, while pertinent to theology and mysticism, would not pass Ṭabāṭabā'ī's standards for true tafsir. For example, while discussing the grammatical meaning of the pronoun "He" in the first verse, Ṣadrā makes the following remarks:

...know that the noun "He" is one of the mighty [divine] Names...it must be known that in this Name are wondrous secrets and extraordinary details, for example, it is made up of only two letters, one of which is 'ha', which emerges from the depths of the throat and is the farthest point of articulation, while the other is 'wa' which emerges from the lips and is the first location of articulation-- here then is a subtle allusion that He, the Exalted, is 'the First' and 'the Last'....⁴⁵

This is one of many digressions superfluous to tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, regardless of its relevance to other fields. While Ṣadrā's exegesis runs 26 pages, Ṭabāṭabā'ī in roughly three pages highlights the most relevant points of *tawḥīd* presented in the surah, without inserting any explicitly *kalāmī*, *'irfanī*, or philosophical elaborations.

So while there are numerous separate discussions (*abḥāth*) in *al-Mizān* analyzing a topic solely drawing upon the terminology and concepts of *falsafah*, in the central *bayān* section Ṭabāṭabā'ī consciously tries to limit the explicit invocation of rational

⁴⁴ M 20:448.

⁴⁵ Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī, *Majmū'a-yi Rasā'il-i Falsafī-yi Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn*, Ed. Ḥamid Nāji Iṣfahānī. (Tehran: Hikmat, 1375 SH), 417.

principles. This follows his practice with hadith; just as he only occasionally quotes *mutawātur* or *mashhūr* hadith in the *bayān* section, not for the sake of tafsir but in order to “strengthen” (*ta’yīd*) a conclusion reached by tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, so too he only selectively cites key rational principles. For example, besides the above-mentioned use of *waḥdat al-wujūd al-tashkīkī* to deeply comprehend the meaning of God’s “coming”, Ṭabāṭabā’ī also draws upon the philosophical principle of causation to explain numerous Qur’anic topics, such as miracles and free will.⁴⁶ The important Sadrian principles of *ḥarakat jawhariyah* and *‘ilm ḥudūrī* are also invoked to explain the gradual development of the soul and the nature of God’s knowledge of created things (*‘ilm fi’lī*) respectively.⁴⁷ This approach contrasts with that of those who make philosophy, as in the case of Mullā Ṣadrā, or narrations and grammar, like the majority of exegetes, the foundation of their hermeneutics. For a tafsir to qualify as Qur’anic does not necessitate that it be shorn of all rational principles, just as it does not require the abandonment of the authentic hadith. Divine philosophy, like the definite Sunnah, is a means, not the end of exegesis.

⁴⁶ M 1:76, 1:101-2.

⁴⁷ M 1:113, 4:29.

Chapter Five:
Materialism as Negative Philosophy and Mysticism as Meta-philosophy

Critique of Materialism and Empiricism

One of the most prominent themes of *al-Mizān* is the author's fierce opposition to materialism (*aṣālat al-māddah*) and empiricism (*ṭarīq al-ḥiss*), especially to interpret the Qur'anic and philosophical realities. At one point he describes the belief that there is no existence beyond the sensible world as "one of the ugliest errors" (*afshah al-khaṭa'*).¹ At the end of a discussion of the "two-fold descent of the Qur'an"² and the reality of a "sublime reality" (*ḥaqīqat mut'ālīyah*) on which the material Qur'an relies, 'Allāmah concludes:

this is what deep reflection (*tadabbur*) guides to and what the Qur'anic verses indicate, but still the specialists in hadith (*arbāb al-ḥadīth*), most of the *mutakallimīn*, and the empiricist researchers of our age, because their denial of the primacy of the immaterial, are forced to twist (*ḥaml*) these verses and those like them--such as those indicating that the Qur'an is 'guidance', 'mercy' and 'light', [the verses mentioning the origin of the Qur'an is] 'the descending places of the stars', 'the manifest book, 'in the preserved tablet', 'descending from near God', 'in purified books', amongst other realities—and made of them various types of figurative speech and metaphor, reducing the Qur'an into [mere]

¹ M 15:318.

² The "two-fold descent" of the Qur'an refers to the idea, alluded to in the Qur'an and explicitly mentioned in the hadith, that the Qur'an possesses two aspects, a undifferentiated metaphysical aspect called "the Mother of the Book" (*umm al-kitāb*) or the "hidden Book" (*kitāb maknūn*), and a differentiated physical aspect revealed over twenty-three years. Ṭabāṭabā'ī calls the concept a "reality" (*ḥaqīqah*), M 2:19.

poetic prose.³

In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that the realities of philosophy and the Qur'an are neither mere literary metaphors nor mental constructs without an objective metaphysical reality. The Allāmah's strong opposition to materialism is also a prominent theme found in his philosophical works, most prominently in *Uṣūl-i Falsafah wa Ravish-i Riālīzm*, and is in fact a negative restatement of his vision of the realities discussed in the last chapter. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's rationale for coming to Qum as stated in his firmly worded reply to Ayatullah Burūjirdī was the need to equip the *ḥawzah* students with the intellectual tools necessary to "face the false beliefs of the materialists and others."⁴ In other words, the latent essentialism of materialism stands in direct opposition to the existential worldview of both the Qur'an and its philosophical counterpart, divine wisdom. As indicated in the previous chapter, a philosophical system which does not focus on the metaphysical and existential realities is neither authentic nor divinely guided but is really "negative" or "satanic philosophy."⁵ This notion is forcefully expressed in a famous statement by one of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's beloved sage Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn: "death to a philosophy whose standards are incompatible with the Book and Sunnah" (*tabban li-falsafah takūn qawānīnuhā ghayr muṭābaqah lā li-l-kitāb wa-l-sunnah*).⁶ Ṭabāṭabā'ī's unrelenting opposition to materialism and crypto-materialism in religion naturally derives from his stance that the Qur'anic realities are purely metaphysical, untouched by the

³ M 2:19.

⁴ Tīhrānī, *Mīhr-i Tābān*, 62.

⁵ Although the term "negative philosophy" has not been used in *al-Mīzān*, its meaning is implied in the dichotomy the author frequently presents between divinely-guided thinking and its antithesis, materialism in all its philosophical, theological and socio-political forms. One modern Shī'ī philosopher and associate of Miṣbāh Yazdī, one of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's close students, categorizes irreligious philosophy as arrogant and Iblisi. Muhammad Legenhausen, "The Philosophy of Adam ('a)," *Message of Thaḳalayn* 3 (1998/1418): 87-107.

⁶ Ḥasanzādah Āmulī (1378 SH), 9, cited from the "first edition" of *al-Asfār al-Arba'a*, 4:75, unavailable to this writer.

spatiotemporal laws of matter. “It is necessary for a religious researcher to reflect carefully on these Qur’anic verses and to understand that the knowledge obtained from religion (*ma‘ārif dīniyah*) has no connection with the natural sciences or sociology per se; it relies and depends upon realities and spiritual causes (*ma‘ānin*) beyond [matter].”⁷ Therefore, any *mufassir* whose hermeneutics presupposes a materialist view of the Qur’anic realities is in error from the start.⁸

One of the thorough critiques of materialism in *al-Mizān* is found in a discussion entitled “concerning the meaning of sensation and thought” (*kalām fī ma‘na al-iḥsās wa-l-tafkīr*).⁹ After analyzing the sources of knowledge and discussing how theoretical knowledge comes through the senses or intellect, both divine gifts, and how according to the Qur’an practical knowledge is divinely inspired, the ‘Allāmah concludes that “all the knowledge man acquires is only divine guidance, direct or indirect.” The Qur’an encourages the use of sensation, pure reason (*‘aql ṣirf*), and piety (*taqwā*), each in its own sphere. Sensation covers the particular qualities of material objects (*khawāṣṣ*)¹⁰, intellect perceives intellectual universals (*kulliyāt fikrīyah*), whether material or immaterial, and inner inspiration recognizes good and bad. The conclusion is that the negation of the “rulings of pure reason” and the exclusive reliance on experimentation in all areas of thought, especially in religion, is invalidated by the Qur’an. The basis for this Qur’anic rejection of empiricism rests firmly on the nature of its topics, the immaterial realities, behind which lies the supreme reality of *tawḥīd*: “...the first affair on which the Qur’an places importance in is *tawḥīd* of Allah, Exalted is His name...and it is well-known that

⁷ M 1:289.

⁸ ‘Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Pirāmūn -i Wahy wa Rahbarī*. (Qum: al-Zahrā, 1368 SH), 258.

⁹ M 5:314-21.

¹⁰ In the terminology of classical logic “property” (*khāṣṣah*) refers to an accidental quality specific to a species, for example the quality of laughing in humans. See al-Muẓaffar, *al-Mantiq*, 84.

tawhīd is far removed from sensation, most separate from matter, and most closely related to the rulings of pure reason.”¹¹

In another discussion Ṭabāṭabā’ī tackles the contentious epistemological issue of rationalism versus empiricism in the course of a philosophical examination of rational concepts and sensible perceptions.¹² While the discussion in Volume Five was approached primarily from a Qur’anic point of view, here there is reference only to rational arguments. Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s main proofs against the empiricists are that their arguments are based on rational premises; that sense is no less likely than reason to fail; and that the senses can attain no more than “mutable particulars”, while knowledge relies on universal statements that are neither sensible nor observable.

A Skewed Conception of Prophethood

One area where Ṭabāṭabā’ī particularly criticizes the materialist thinkers in their approach to the realities is their conception of prophethood. At best their view of the prophets is that they were social reformers or geniuses. At the end of an extensive discussion on miracles, their role in affirming a particular prophet, and the nature of revelation, Ṭabāṭabā’ī concludes that what the prophet or messenger understands by means of revelation is something far removed from the reach of the senses or discursive and ordinary intellects (*‘uqūluna al-naẓarīyah al-fikrīyah*), and that this is readily apparent to all who reflect on the Qur’anic view of prophethood. “A group of contemporary researchers has deviated by seeking to base the foundation of divine knowledge (*ma‘ārif ilāhīyah*) and the religious realities on the natural sciences and the

¹¹ M 5:318.

¹² M 1:50, entitled *jawāz al-ta’wīl ‘alā ghayr al-maḥsūsāt* in the index.

primacy of evolving and mutable matter.”¹³ Their materialist view leads them to conclude that the prophet “is an [ordinary] human being, an intellectual genius who calls his people to the reform of their social environment.” Similarly, a materialistic understanding also leads to a deficient view of the angels and revelation, and the miracles attributed to the prophets as “concocted nonsense” (*kharafāt maj’ūlah*). For Ṭabāṭabā’ī this conventional view of prophethood “is more deserving of the title political game (*la’bah siyāsīyah*) than divine prophethood” and is far removed from the Qur’anic and Prophetic message. What has lead these modernists to take such a position is a myopic materialist point of view, a denial of metaphysics, and finally a materialist misinterpretation of “the realities transcending matter” (*al-haqā’iq al-muta’ālīyah ‘an-l-māddah*), bringing them down to the level of “lifeless matter.”¹⁴

Such a harsh critique of the modernists would be expected from a firm rationalist like Ṭabāṭabā’ī, but what is more noteworthy is his next remark that these modern materialists are really just a “new phase” (*taṭawwur jadīd*) of a much older crypto-materialism found among the classical *mutakallimīn*. The latter, while affirming the existence of the realities, nonetheless brought them down to a material level by claiming that they were “purely material affairs, albeit neither sensible nor governed by the laws of matter.” However, the reality is the opposite the view of both groups; for the *ḥaqā’iq* are both real and immaterial.¹⁵ Later in the same volume Ṭabāṭabā’ī also castigates the Sunni *muhaddithīn* for also holding a quasi-materialistic conception of intangible realities such

¹³ M 1:89.

¹⁴ M 1:90.

¹⁵ In another discussion on prophecy Ṭabāṭabā’ī returns to the materialist conception, severely attacking it as “an interpretation which does not fit the reality of prophecy”, M 2:155-8. He also reiterates this criticism in *Qur’ān dar Islām*, 91-94.

as angels and the spirit.¹⁶

Finally, a comprehensive statement rejecting any affiliation of the *ḥaqā'iq* with empiricism and materialism is found in an unnamed critique of perhaps Ṭabāṭabā'ī's most frequent target on this issue, *Tafsīr al-Manār*. The critique takes place in a discussion concerning their rejection of some narrations mentioning that the Black Stone presently part of the Ka'bah descended from Paradise. In Chapter Four mention was made of the 'Allāmah's critique of their hasty rejection of such narrations as "Israelite nonsense" as an example of modernist extremism vis-à-vis the hadith corpus. The important point is the philosophy on which Ṭabāṭabā'ī views as having led to the rejection of these hadith. Firstly he argues that such a rejection arises from "the bias of his point of view [the author(s) of *al-Manār*] which denies the spiritual realities brought by the prophets, [and] that the outward aspects of religion (*ẓawāhir dīnīyah*) rely on spiritual foundations and roots (*uṣūl wa a'rāq ma'nawīyah*)." Such a view presupposes instead that every occurrence, spiritual or material, reverts to a material cause. Whereas, as Ṭabāṭabā'ī repeatedly argues in *al-Mīzān*, the role of the natural sciences "is to investigate the particular qualities of matter, its compounds, and the relationship between their effects and causes...but regarding those realities removed from the sphere of matter....they are affairs separate from the research of the natural and social sciences."¹⁷

Scientific Exegesis as Crypto-Materialist Hermeneutics

Another hermeneutical trend which from Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view would be a clear case

¹⁶ M 1:344.

¹⁷ M 1:289.

of materialistic myopia is the contemporary phenomenon of “scientific exegesis”.¹⁸ The ‘Allāmah would not deny that the Qur’an alludes to various scientific facts, and he would affirm that the wonders of the natural world point to the greatness of its Creator. But just as it is clear that the Qur’an has not been revealed to confirm (or contradict) ancient philosophy, neither has it been revealed to validate (or invalidate) modern science. One prominent exponent of a tafsir relying on the discoveries and theories of the natural sciences is Ṭaṭābā’ī. ¹⁹ Even the subtitle of his *Tafsīr al-Jawāhir* (“consisting of the wondrous innovations found in creation and the marvels of [its] extraordinary and brilliant signs”), clearly reflects the author’s conscious efforts to highlight chiefly this area. In the introduction Jawharī openly calls upon the Muslims to study the natural sciences as a means to understand the Qur’an.²⁰ While he does include a “verbal explanation” (*baḥṭh lafzī*) section at the beginning of each section, it is only a perfunctory word for word gloss of each *āyah* in the style of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. The majority of his commentary functions as a platform for reflection on the material world and the theories of modern science. In this scientific approach, little or nothing remains of the metaphysical foundations of the Qur’anic realities; for example while commenting on the meaning of “universe” (*al-‘ālamīn*) Jawharī adds to the traditional interpretation of the word as “everything other than Allah” a prolix “commentary” that leaves no room for existence

¹⁸ It is generally called *tafsīr ‘ilmī*. For a brief survey of Muslim scholarly opinion on the style, see Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-Mufasssīrūn*. 2 vols. (n.p, Dār al-Maktab al-Ḥadīthah, 1397/1976), 2:479-91; and for a Western perspective see Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 35-54. Ṭaṭābā’ī prefers the term *ṭab’ī* rather than *‘ilmī* to describe this hermeneutics. Although in *al-Mizān* there are sections entitled *baḥṭh ‘ilmī* these have the general meaning of “academic discussions” and are completely unrelated to issues of modern science.

¹⁹ For a rather outdated discussion of Ṭaṭāwī and his tafsir see Jansen, *Interpretation of the Koran*, 44-6.

²⁰ Ṭaṭāwī Jawharī, *al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*. 26 vols. (n.p, al-Maktabat al-Islāmīyah, 1350), 1:3.

outside the material world. The universe in his view consists of a “higher” realm of the stars, planets, heavens, and a “lower” one of plants, seas, minerals.

Chapter Two illustrated Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s explicit rejection of an exegetical approach to the Qur’anic verse “and there is not a thing but with Us are its sources ...” to its commonplace material instances. For him such a superficial exegesis is no more than imposing preconceived opinions on the Qur’an, a prime example of *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*. This point would obviously apply with equal force to the whole project of “scientific tafsir”. It has been shown more than once how much emphasis ‘Allāmah places on the pitfalls faced by those “immersed in the natural sciences” who speculate on the Qur’an and its realities beyond sensation and experimentation, particularly *tawḥīd*. As with hadith, grammar, and philosophy, if the *zāhir al-āyāt* does not remain the exegetical focal point, the result is inherently not tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an.

The Meta-Philosophy of Mysticism

At the opposite extreme from the worldview of materialism and empiricism is *‘irfān*. The materialists either explicitly deny metaphysical realities or discuss them as though they were ordinary material things, thereby promoting a negative philosophy. The *‘urafā*, however, assert that the existence of the realities is literally clear as day and that the direct way to reach them is the vision of the heart (*baṣīrat al-qalb*), not discursive reasoning. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, *‘irfān* is intertwined with the vision of “divine philosophy,” especially in its later crystallization espoused by Mullā Ṣadrā and Ṭabāṭabā’ī. In fact *‘irfān* is so closely related to later Islamic philosophy that Sadrian

thought should be called “mystical philosophy.”²¹

As with his broad vision of philosophy as *ta‘aqqul* and *burhān*, or “researching real matters by means of sound proofs”, concerning *‘irfān* Ṭabāṭabā’ī steps back from the protracted debates and elaborate discussions found in Islamic intellectual history and looks at its meaning and importance from the perspective of knowledge of self and God. Literally, *‘irfān* is the knowledge of ones self (*ma‘rifat al-nafs*) and Lord encapsulated in the famous Prophetic saying “whosoever knows himself has indeed known his Lord” (*man ‘arafa nafsahu fa-qad ‘arafa rabbah*). There are also numerous sayings in the authoritative Shī‘ī hadith collections to the effect that direct cognizance of God, obtained by maintaining a strong religious bond (*walāyah*) with the Divine Proof (*ḥujjat Allāh*), is the foundation of Islam.²² For the *‘urafā*, this knowledge does not mean the normal acquired learning available to both believers and disbelievers, but rather refers to a higher form of direct understanding and awareness of God reserved for His select sincere and purified servants, called in the Qur’an *awliyā’*, *muqarrabīn*, *mukhlaṣīn* or *muṭahharīn*. In Sadrian philosophy this knowledge is called “unmediated knowledge” (*‘ilm ḥudūrī*).²³

Authentic *‘irfān*, then, is none other the theoretical and practical dimensions of direct knowledge of God and his signs, achieved by constant purification of the self from

²¹ S.H.M. Rizvi and S. Safavi, two specialists in post-Avicennan philosophy, have written a survey of his life and ideas appropriately entitled *Mulla Sadra: Philosopher of the Mystics*. (London: Islamic Texts Society, 2003). A prominent student of Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ḥasanzādah Āmulī, describes Ṣadrā’s *al-Asfār al-Arba‘a* as a philosophical explanation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ* and *Futūḥāt* (al-Ḥaydari, *al-Tawhid*, 230 footnote 51). In M 5:276, 288 Ṭabāṭabā’ī confirms the idea, common in Islamic thought in general and Shī‘ī thought in particular, that mysticism need not necessitate irrationalism.

²² Numerous examples of these hadith are found in the lengthy book on the divine proof (*kitāb al-Ḥujjah*) al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, 1:219-508.

²³ Although more commonly translated as “knowledge by presence”, “unmediated knowledge” better conveys the key difference between it and its counterpart, mediated knowledge (*‘ilm ḥuṣūlī*). Although both involve the presence of the object of knowing before the knower, in *‘ilm ḥuṣūlī* the mental form (*ṣūrah*) of the known object mediates between the two, while in *‘ilm ḥudūrī* the object of knowing is directly present before the knower. See al-Muzaffar, *al-Manṭiq*, 21.

its lower inclinations (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and refinement of good character traits (*tadhīb al-akhlāq*). The human being, exemplified in the “friends of God” (*awliyā*), is potentially the greatest of these Divine signs, called in its terminology the Perfect Man (*insān kāmil*). ‘*Irfān*, the path of the heart, is none other than a meta-philosophy which looks at the realities in non-discursive, direct manner.²⁴ It is the same demonstrative proofs of mundane philosophy realized in transcendent philosophy through intuition (*dhawq*) and unveiling (*kashf*).²⁵

After the *bayān* discussion of the verse “O you who believe—take care of your souls (*alaykum anfusakum*)”²⁶ Ṭabāṭabā’ī sets aside two further discussions, one narrative and the other academic, under the general title ‘*irfān al-nafs*.²⁷ In this section he outlines his vision of authentic Islamic mysticism, beginning with the famous hadith “whoever has known his own self has indeed known his Lord.” Like the discussion of perception and reasoning in Volume Five the very prolixity of these discussions indicates the centrality of the topic for Ṭabāṭabā’ī, since his writings are characteristically concise and laconic. It was indicated in Chapter One that following the path of his influential teacher, ‘Allāmah Qāḍī, Ṭabāṭabā’ī views knowledge of the self as the firmest way to knowledge of God.²⁸ Ṭabāṭabā’ī does not merely claim legitimacy for the saying “whosoever knows his self...” solely by relying on the usual technical standards. While he does comment that both Sunnis and Shī‘ah classify the hadith as “well-known”

²⁴ The present writer is indebted to ‘Alī Qūlī Qarā’ī for the characterization of ‘*irfān* as meta-philosophy. See his introduction to *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*, xiii.

²⁵ Interestingly, this understanding of ordinary versus transcendent philosophy is provided by the Peripatetic Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī in his famous commentary on Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*. See Rizvi, “Mysticism and Philosophy,” 244, footnote 35.

²⁶ Q 5:105.

²⁷ M 6:161-93. It is noteworthy that Ṭabāṭabā’ī selected the title ‘*irfān al-nafs* instead of the more expected *ma’rifat al-nafs*. Perhaps this was a subtle way of indicating his support for the maligned field.

²⁸ Tihirānī, “Risāla-yi Lubb al-Albāb”, 252.

(*mashhūr*), he goes a step further and establishes its validity from tafsir itself, aided by a simple tool of logic. By “obverting” the meaning (*‘aks al-naqīd*) of the verse, “do not be like those who forgot Allah so He made them forget their own selves”,²⁹ he demonstrates that those who do not forget Him, God will never make forget their own selves. The conclusion drawn from this and other similar *āyāt* is that the contents of the numerous hadith on the importance of self-knowledge are valid from the Qur’anic viewpoint, regardless of their individual technical authenticity.

Ṭabāṭabā’ī then reflects on another saying attributed to Imam ‘Alī: “knowledge (*ma‘rifah*) through the soul is the more beneficial of the two forms of knowledge”. He comments that the “two forms of knowledge” here refer to two paths to knowledge of God. The first is by the internal signs of the soul, the second by reflecting and reasoning with the aid of the external signs of creation.³⁰ Ṭabāṭabā’ī discusses the differences between realizing one’s Lord through the direct path of the soul- the one he and his teachers prefer- and the indirect path of analogies and conjectures obtained by reflecting on external reality. *Ma‘rifat al-nafs* is the superior *ma‘rifah* since it dispenses with the intermediary proofs found in deduction and demonstration. While the path of *burhān*, exemplified in its extreme form by the rigid rationalism of some Peripatetics, has a positive role in religion, its epistemic range is inherently limited. This is because the intellect grasps only universal concepts (*mafāhīm kullīyah*) and verbal utterances; it cannot directly intuit realities, which is the task of the heart. Discursive reasoning alone is not sufficient: “the true *ma‘rifah* of Allah cannot be fully acquired through thoughtful knowledge.”

²⁹ Q 59:19.

³⁰ As found in Q 41:53.

However, as with the pseudo-philosophers, the ‘Allāmah also castigates the pseudo-mystics, whose profligate behavior has given their field a bad reputation amongst the exoteric scholars.

They [the pseudo-mystics] continued innovating new traditions and abandoned the legitimate ones. Ultimately the Shariah was placed on one side and *ṭarīqah* on another. Naturally this led to indulgence in unlawful things and the omission of incumbent duties and obligations, which are the waymarks (*sha‘āir*) of the religion. The like of the Qalandariyah appeared and nothing remained of *taṣawwuf* except beggary and addition to opium and bhang, their [so-called] ‘annihilation of the self’ (*fanā*).³¹

Despite his affirmation of the way of knowledge of the self, however, he cautions against concluding from this that religion is purely a spiritual affair. “Beware lest the affair becomes ambiguous for you and you conclude from the above discussions that religion is [merely] *‘irfān* and *taṣawwuf*, or *ma‘rifat al-nafs...*”³²

It was mentioned in Chapter Three that a common tactic of the author of *al-Mizān* to deflate the strict *muḥaddithīn* arguments’ against *ijtihād* in *tafsir* was the citation of the abundant and explicit hadith in its support. In the previous chapter it was also shown how Shī‘ī proponents of philosophy reference the abundant narrations in the authoritative hadith collections which contain strongly rational arguments to prove the overall legitimacy of reasoning in religion. Similarly, the Shī‘ī *‘urafā*’ have cited the numerous hadith of a mystical nature to support their theories. For example, while the concept of “the Muhammadan Reality” (*ḥaqīqat Muḥammadiyah*) or Light (*nūr Muḥammadiyah*), is

³¹ M 5:288.

³² M 6:186.

a prominent one in Islamic mysticism, there are so many narrations on the subject that even many strictly exoteric Shī‘ī scholars accept it. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī equates the first Intellect with the reality of the Ahl al-Bayt, who serve as intermediaries (*wasā’iṭ*) between God and His effusion (*ifāḍah*), quoting a number of well-known hadith in this matter and classifying them as abundant, affirmed or *mutawātir*.³³ Ṭabāṭabā’ī touches upon the *ḥaqīqat Muḥammadiyah* in his discussion of a verse particularly dear to the mystics, “and He taught Adam all the names...”³⁴ In his commentary he alludes to gnostics’ view that the “names” are those of God, manifested through the spirit of the Prophet.³⁵

What is apparent from the previous discussion is that the knowledge of these named things (*al-musammāt*, the names which God taught Adam) must be such that the names uncover their realities (*ḥaqā’iqihim*) and their entified beings (*a’yān wujūdatihim*), not just what verbal constructs provide of mental concepts. So these named things taught [to Adam] are external realities and entified beings, despite which they are hidden beneath the cover of the unseen-’the unseen of the heavens and earth’, knowledge of which is first a feasible and possible for an earthly existent, not a heavenly angel, and secondly plays a role in the divine vice-regency (*khilāfat ilāhīyah*).³⁶

He elaborates on the same theme in a *baḥṭh riwā’i* concerning other verses dealing with the story of Adam³⁷ and in another place explicitly calls the narrations concerning the

³³ Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 1:103.

³⁴ Q 1:31.

³⁵ According to the Shī‘ah the light of the Ahl al-Bayt is inseparable from that of the Prophet, for example the numerous hadith on this issue in Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 25:1-36.

³⁶ M 1:119.

³⁷ M 1:149.

Muhammadan Light “many and abundant”, warning the reader against rejecting them as “fabrications and delusions of the pseudo-Sufis.”³⁸

The story of Adam and the genesis of creation is one of the infrequent instances in *al-Mīzān* where explicitly *‘irfānī* language is used, for the author’s point of view a close reading of the verses concerning the creation, supported by the teachings of the definite Sunnah and divine philosophy, necessitates such a reading. Adam, and by extension all the prophets and *awliyā’*, could not achieve any remarkable distinction in front of the angels merely by learning ordinary names composed of verbal utterances. If that were the case they would be equal after his teaching them the names and so there would be no basis for their prostration before him.

Ṭabāṭabā’ī believed that no mystical discussion can contradict the findings of *baḥth ‘aqlī*, and certainly must not become the foundation for tafsir of the *zāhir al-āyāt*. Even in those few sections when he uses such *‘irfānī* terminology it is mostly by way of allusion, and never does he abandon his tempered and controlled style. Although in *al-Mīzān* there are numerous independent Qur’anic, narrative, philosophical, historical and social discussions, there are none openly labeled *baḥth ‘irfānī*. Perhaps the aforementioned discussion on *‘irfān al-nafs* is the only extensive separate “mystical” one in *al-Mīzān*, and even there the topic is examined primarily from the perspective of the Qur’an and Sunnah. His foremost student in tafsir, Jawādī Āmulī, notes that while the ‘Allāmah “had full acquaintance with the foundations of ‘*irfān* and the general principles of unveiling, as well as the various types of witnessing”, and encouraged self-purification, “never did he make his or other’s unveilings the standard (*mi’yār*) for

³⁸ M 1:123.

tafsir.”³⁹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī himself briefly alludes to this position in the prologue of *al-Mizān* when he says he will not rely on any mystic unveiling (*mukāshafat ‘irfānīyah*) in his tafsir.

“A Mystical Tafsir”

A comparison between what Ṭabāṭabā’ī intends by tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an and a consciously mystical work, ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī’s *al-Ta’wīlāt*, illustrates the stark difference between the two approaches.⁴⁰ Kāshānī’s tafsir is replete with the terminology of theoretical mysticism but lacks explanation as to why these often fanciful interpretations are accurate; presumably the standard is the spiritual unveilings of the mystics. While Kāshānī’s tafsir of Sūrat al-Iklāṣ takes little over a page, it is formulated almost strictly in terms of the technical terminology of *‘irfān* derived from Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers. For example, the pronoun ‘He’ represents “the pure singular reality of the divine essence”, whereas the Divine name *Aḥad* refers to “the absolute reality which is the source of the “spring of camphor” (*‘ayn kāfūrī*), rather the spring of camphor itself.⁴¹

Again, while Ṭabāṭabā’ī does not deny but repeatedly affirms the existence of *bāṭin al-Qur’ān*,⁴² his objection is that such academic exercises cannot be categorized as

³⁹ Jawādī Āmulī, *Piramūn-i Wahy wa Rahbarī*, 256

⁴⁰ Ṭabāṭabā’ī says “he took the way of *‘irfān* in tafsir”, *Qur’ān dar Islām*, 69. Elsewhere he acknowledges that the work is well-known as Kāshānī’s; Rukhshād, *Dar Maḥḍar-i ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī*, 153. Even today, however, it is erroneously published under the title *Tafsir Ibn ‘Arabī*.

⁴¹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Tafsir Ibn ‘Arabī* [sic]. 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001), 2:468. The meaning of Kāshānī’s spring of camphor is unclear to the present writer, although such evocative and allusive terminology is characteristic of the theoretical mysticism of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers.

⁴² In theoretical mysticism *bāṭin al-Qur’ān* also refers to the metaphysical reality of the physical book transcending words and intellectual concepts. This differs from the *bāṭin* discussed here which is a conceptual, not ontological, issue.

proper tafsir, nor justifiable by their contrived understanding (*lughat mustahdithah*) of *ta'wīl*.

There are traditions narrated from the Prophet and the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt saying for example: ‘verily the Qur’an has an exterior (*ẓāhir*) and an interior (*bāṭin*), and its interior has an interior up to seven (or seventy) interiors...’ but they [the Prophet and Imams] gave as much importance to its exterior as its interior; they were as much concerned with revelation (*tanzīl*) as they were with “esoteric interpretation” (*ta'wīl*)⁴³

The question arises as to how does Ṭabāṭabā’ī understand the aforementioned *bāṭin al-Qur’ān*. In his view the “inner meaning” of a verse is the application of its surface meaning to particular circumstances not immediately related to its original context. Another term frequently used by the author of *al-Mizān* for *bāṭin* is the “flow” (*jary*) of a verse. The term originates in a hadith narrated by Imam Bāqir: “it [the Qur’an] flows just like the sun and moon.”⁴⁴ Since it has no precedents in the classical tafsirs, the use of the term *jary* in this way appears to be an original contribution of Ṭabāṭabā’ī to *‘ilm al-tafsīr*. In *al-Mizān* the ‘Allāmah gives examples of *bāṭin* or *jary* particularly relevant to mysticism, perhaps an indication of the predominantly mystical nature of *bāṭin al-Qur’ān*. These include the application of the Qur’anic verses encouraging [outer] jihad to jihad with the self, those condemning the hypocrites to the sinning believers; and those mentioning sinners in general to “the people of vigilance, remembrance and presence” (*ahl al-murāqabah wa-l-dhikr, wa-l-ḥudūr*), namely the ‘*urafā*’, when they become neglectful or careless in remembering God. However, since the duty of a

⁴³ M 1:10.

⁴⁴ M 3:84; Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Qur’ān dar Islām*, 62.

mufassir “revolves around the exterior”⁴⁵, not its every possible application, the role of *jary* or *bāṭin al-āyah* is accidental to the goals of true tafsir. Numerous times the ‘Allāmah mentions possible meanings of verses which are “correct in and themselves” (*ma‘na saḥiḥ fī nafsih*) but which do not fit the context and apparent meanings of those verses, so he does not give such interpretations much consideration.⁴⁶ This is as true of fanciful *‘irfānī* applications like those of Kāshānī no less than myopic materialist ones like those of Jawharī.

⁴⁵ M 8:212.

⁴⁶ M 1:130, 2:295, 5:275.

Chapter Six:
Āyāt al-Ghurar. Keys to the Balance

In Chapter Four it was mentioned that Ṭabāṭabā'ī, because of his focus on the broader theological and spiritual meanings of tafsir, shied away from quoting those hadith, the *faḍā'il al-suwar*, which describe the rewards given to the reciter of certain *sūrahs* or verses. Besides the fact that these *faḍā'il* hadith are generally of dubious technical authenticity, they rarely aid in the main duty of an exegete, explaining the *zāhir al-āyāt*. The near habitual citation of the *faḍā'il al-suwar* hadith in the majority of previous tafsirs is a good example of how uncritical imitation of the classical hadith-based hermeneutics “halts the march of [exegetical] knowledge in place”.¹ In their place Ṭabāṭabā'ī contributes a new and important genre in tafsir, the “preeminent verses” *āyāt al-ghurar*, which reflects his concern to find a dynamic yet balanced exegetical where the Qur'anic verses, not non-Qur'anic texts, are the focal point. The *āyāt al-ghurar* consist of those key verses found in certain *sūrahs* which most aid in unlocking the Qur'anic realities.² They could be thought of as those foundational verses which a serious mujtahid in tafsir would constantly refer to tie together the various concepts and motifs scattered throughout the Qur'an. Previous scholars and exegetes have remarked that even though all the Qur'anic verses are divine speech and marked by excellence, some have more excellence (*afḍal*) than others. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, however, was the first to actively discuss the importance and place of these *āyāt* within the framework of his own considered hermeneutics. As shown in Chapter Two, previous exegetes preceded

¹ M 3:99.

² Ṭabāṭabā'ī also labels some hadith as *ghurar*. Those he mentions are all from Imam 'Alī, especially the sermons of *Nahj al-Balāghah* on *tawhīd*. M 5:281

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's in arguing for tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, yet none of them seriously implemented the idea like the author of *al-Mizān*. Similarly, some previous exegetes realized that some individual verses are pivotal and preeminent without elaborating exactly how; for example Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī has a work illustrating this point.³ In it he briefly describes how it is true that some Qur'anic verses are more eminent than others, citing several well-known Prophetic hadith to prove this point, but without elaboration. The main section of his book, "jewels of the Qur'an" is a listing of 763 verses arranged according to *sūrah*. The list comes without any commentary why these particular verses merit more attention than others.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not view tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an as the mere collection of every verse containing similar topics or wording; rather the exegete must strive hard and reflect how each *āyah* or set of *āyāt* relates to the overall Qur'anic worldview. Ṭabāṭabā'ī contends that all the Qur'anic verses are connected by the concept of *tawḥīd*, the absolute unity of God in terms of divinity, lordship and right of worship. In his interpretation of the verse "[This is] a Book, whose signs have been made definite and then elaborated from One [who is] all-wise, all-aware, so that you worship none but Allah..."⁴ Ṭabāṭabā'ī comments:

The Qur'anic verses, despite their containing the elaboration of these [above-mentioned] divine doctrines and true realities rely on one reality which is like the root for all its branches, or the foundation upon which the structure of religion is based. And that [reality] is the monotheism of Islam, which declares that He is the Lord of every thing, no other lord, and He must be submitted to in every

³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*. Edited by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā al-Qabbānī. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-'Ulūm, 1405/1985).

⁴ Q 10:2.

regard and fully given all the rights of lordship. There should be neither humility in the heart nor humbleness in action except for the sake of His affair.⁵

Ṭabāṭabā'ī further explains that the Qur'anic verses, despite their surface diversity in terms of content and goals, are like a "body" possessing a single "spirit". This spirit is "the pure Islamic monotheism" (*tawḥīd al-Islām, tawḥīd khālīṣ*),⁶ which is pure because it is not mixed with any polytheistic teachings. As one of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's foremost students in tafsir has noted, the *āyāt al-ghurar* are really none other than *āyāt al-tawḥīd*, all the Qur'anic realities which the *ayat al-ghurar* reveal revert back, directly or through intermediaries, to the supreme reality of pure monotheism encapsulated in the aforementioned verse, "so that you worship none but Allah."⁷

At the end of prologue of *al-Mīzān*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī provides a list of topics which are "the result of the explanations obtained from the method [of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an]". With two exceptions the list conforms exactly to the topics presented in the series of treatises written before *al-Mīzān* and posthumously published under the title *al-Rasā'il al-Tawḥīdīyah*. A careful examination of these topics reveals how closely they are related to the topics of the *āyāt al-ghurar*. All of these topics, namely the essence, names, and acts of God and the threefold spiritual journey of man from origin to return, derive directly or indirectly from *tawḥīd*. It is likely that Ṭabāṭabā'ī believed those Qur'anic verses which he described in *al-Mīzān* as "preeminent" earned that appellation from their pivotal role in elucidating the various philosophical and theological realities which he had previously presented in an organized way in the treatises of *al-Rasā'il al-Tawḥīdīyah*.

⁵ M 10:129.

⁶ M 5:21.

⁷ Jawādī Āmulī, *Prāmūn-i Wahy wa Rahbarī*, 261.

One example of the close relationship between the essays of *al-Rasā'il al-Tawhīdīyah*, *al-Mizān*, and the *āyāt al-ghurar*, can be seen in one of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's favorite topics, the higher macrocosmic realms variously called by the philosophers and mystics 'ālam al-mithāl, 'ālam al-tajarrud, 'ālam al-malakūt and 'ālam al-jabarūt. For Ṭabāṭabā'ī however, these realms are not only realities of philosophy or mysticism but are just as much realities of the Qur'an and Sunnah. They are first and foremost represented in his perhaps most cited *ghurrah* verse, "and there is not a thing but with Us are its treasures, and We do not send them down but in a fixed measure".⁸ It has already been stressed that Ṭabāṭabā'ī uses this very verse to illustrate how a superficial tafsir of the "divine treasures" as mere mundane objects is not only conjecture and *ra'y* but also goes against the explicit wording of the *āyah*. Perhaps the generality and absoluteness of its wording (*wa-mā min shay'*) is one of the reasons why Ṭabāṭabā'ī repeatedly quotes the verse and describes it as "one of the outstanding Qur'anic verses, containing a wealth of religious knowledge". Taken in conjunction with similar verses it clearly affirms that existence is more encompassing than the physical observable world.

An immediate question arising from the above *āyah* is the nature of the divine treasures. Ṭabāṭabā'ī addresses this issue in his commentary on the verse "with Him are the treasures of the unseen (*mafātīḥ al-ghayb*), none knows them but Him"⁹. According to the standard reading, *mafātīḥ* is the plural of *maftaḥ*, "treasure", and therefore is the semantic equivalent of the treasures (*khazā'in*) mentioned in the aforementioned verse of the divine treasures. Additional information about the nature of the treasures is added in this verse when an exegete reflects that the treasures are connected to the unseen (*ghayb*)

⁸ Q 15:21

⁹ Q 6:131.

and that none know them but God. In the Qur'an frequent mention is made of the unseen, which is often contrasted with the visible world; for example, one of the divine names is Knower of the seen and unseen (*'ālim al-ghayb wa-l-shahādah*). There are two other verses which confirm that the treasures are "with God" (*'indanā*)¹⁰ while another clearly states that "what is with you shall be spent, but what is with God shall last".¹¹ This last *āyah*, taken in conjunction with "everything perishes except His face"¹² affirms the immaterial and eternal nature of the treasures as well as their connection to the "face of God". The face of God cannot be understood as an ordinary face, since there is a verse which decisively declares "nothing is like Him" as well as firm rational proofs negating corporeality of God. Tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an requires that the Qur'an itself provide the meaning of this "multivalent" verse, not conjectures of the ordinary understanding of the word "face". One answer to the nature of the divine face is found in Sūrat al-Raḥmān which says: "everything on it [the earth] is ephemeral, yet lasting is the Face of your Lord, majestic and munificent" (*wajhu rabbika dhū-l-jalāli wa-l-ikrām*).¹³ Reflection on the verse reveals that the attribute "majestic and munificent" is attributed to the face, not to the Lord. The names of majesty and munificence, as Ṭabāṭabā'ī notes, cover all the divine names, both those related to God's transcendence and splendor (*jalāl*) as well as those indicating His immanence and benevolence (*jamāl*). He says "The One possessing majesty and munificent is one of the perfect names [of God] which on the conceptual level completely encompasses all the names of beauty and grandeur".¹⁴ The divine "face", therefore, represents the divine names, since through them, not the essence,

¹⁰ Q 7:131, 17:21.

¹¹ Q 16:96.

¹² Q 28:88.

¹³ Q 55:26.

¹⁴ M 19:106.

God “faces” the creation. Ṭabāṭabā’ī points out that the linguistic meaning of “face” supports this understanding:

The ‘face’ of a thing is that by means of which others are encountered and by it others are sought. In His case (immaculate is He) it refers to the noble attributes which serve as intermediaries between Him and His creation. Through them He brings down the blessings of creation and administration, like knowledge, power, hearing, seeing, mercy, forgiveness and subsistence. There has already been a thorough discussion in the tafsir of Surat al-A‘rāf concerning how His names and attributes serve as intermediaries (*wasā’it*) between Him and His creation.”¹⁵

Another possibility emerges regarding the nature of the treasures; they are intimately related to the divine names.

The above conclusions and the method of their derivation is a typical example of tafsir of the Qur’an by Qur’an as found in *al-Mizān*; reflecting carefully on one verse, then proceeding to other verses with a clear terminological and semantic relationship to the verse under consideration, then drawing possible conclusions based on a collective and contemplative reading of those verses. These conclusions in turn can be verified and supported by various *riwāyāt* on the issue as well as *burhān ‘aqlī*. On the issue of the unseen realms that are close to God there are numerous philosophical and narrative proofs to confirm the conclusions drawn from tafsir of the Qur’an by Qur’an. We will touch on some of them when discussing the ‘Allāmah’s discussion of this issue in an important early treatise, *Risālat al-Wasā’it*.

These conclusions about the divine treasures can also be found with additional

¹⁵ M 19:105.

details in the Qur’anic verses describing the *malakūt*. Perhaps the most important example, as well as another instance of the *āyāt al-ghurar*, is the final two verses of *Sūrat Yāsīn* “All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it ‘Be’ and it is. So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things and to whom you shall be brought back”¹⁶ Ṭabāṭabā’ī mentions more than once that careful reflection on these verses reveals a number of realities and veridical knowledge concerning the affair (*amr*) of God.¹⁷ The affair of God in bringing something into creation (*ijād takwīn*) is immediate and relates directly to His will, without any intermediaries. It contrasts with the gradual creation of a thing (*khalq tadrijī*) as found in the material world with numerous intermediaries. When the following verse mentions that God has the *malakūt* of everything in His hand it is referring to His absolute sovereignty over that aspect of a thing which lies beyond its gradual creation, and close to God, or “that aspect of the two aspects of the existence of things which is proximate to (*tālīyah*) Him, the Exalted”. Ṭabāṭabā’ī then contrasts the meaning of *malakūt* with a similar and frequently encountered Qur’anic term, *mulk*. *Mulk* refers to “that aspect of things which follows creation, or the aspect which covers both aspects.” In conjunction with other verses describing the “affair/command” and “creation”, most prominently “Look! All creation and command belong to Allah”¹⁸ and “They ask *you* concerning the Spirit. Say: the Spirit is from the command of my Lord”¹⁹ it can be deduced that the characteristics of the *malakūt*, the realm of the immediate creative will of God, fit with the attributes of the

¹⁶ It is said that Ṭabāṭabā’ī asked ‘Allāmah Qāḍī why some narrations call *Sūrat Yāsīn* “the heart of the Qur’an”. He replied that it was due to these two verses.

¹⁷ *Amr* means both ‘command’ as well as ‘affair’ but Ṭabāṭabā’ī argues that these verses are describing the immediate nature of the divine will, not an actual verbal command in opposition to a prohibition, so ‘affair’ seems the more apparent meaning here.

¹⁸ Q 7:53.

¹⁹ Q 17:85.

divine treasures and treasures of the unseen; *malakūt*, *khazā'in* and *mafātīh al-ghayb* then could be considered as different expressions pointing to the same reality.

Turning to another key *āyat al-malakūt*, “Thus did We show Abraham the dominions (*malakūt*) of the heavens and earth that he might be of those who possess certitude”²⁰, an additional important quality about the *malakūt/khazā'in/mafātīh al-ghayb* is revealed. Abraham’s certitude is the direct result of God’s showing him the dominion, which as shown from the last verse of Sūrat Yāsīn is immaterial in nature and related to the immediate divine will. In other words God opened Abraham’s inner vision to witness the higher reality of creation, also called in Qur’an “the unseen of the heavens and earth”, and that this spiritual witnessing produces absolute certainty about God’s omnipotence. After commenting on the lexical meaning of *malakūt* as well as pointing out that God’s dominion is not like ours in that ours is conventional and mentally posited while His is real and existential, he concludes: “it has become clear that the *malakūt* is the existence of a thing from the viewpoint of its direct connection to God and His supporting it. This is a matter which does not accept any partners and is specific to Him alone. So the divine lordship, which is His sovereignty and administration, allows neither delegation nor transference of ownership. Therefore the viewing of the *malakūt* of things definitely guides a person to *tawḥīd* just as He says ‘have they not contemplated the dominions of the heavens and earth and whatever things Allah has created, and that maybe their time has drawn near? So what discourse will they believe after this?’²¹...so it also becomes clear that the meaning of God’s showing Abraham the *malakūt* of the heavens and earth- according to what deep reflection on other related verses tells us- is His directing his

²⁰ Q 6:75.

²¹ Q 7:185.

noble self to witnessing things from the viewpoint of the connection of their existence to Him...”²²

It is possible that Abraham’s vision of the *malakūt* is an event described in Sūrat al-Baqarah.²³ In that verse Abraham asks God to show him how He brings the dead back to life and God rhetorically asks Abraham whether he has certainty in His omnipotence. Abraham replies that indeed he does but that he is searching for utter tranquility of the heart. God orders him to cut up four birds, mix their bodies and place them on various mountains. He then orders Abraham to call the birds so that they return to life and fly back to him. In that way Abraham will know that God is all-mighty and all-wise. According to Ṭabāṭabā’ī the above verse should be understood in the context of the previous verses, starting with the famous *āyat al-kursī*. It describes the general concept of God’s absolute unity and maintenance of all things and follows with two verses describing the nature of religion, guidance, and error, as well as how He guides the believers and misguides the disbelievers. The following three verses, ending with the above-mentioned verse of Abraham’s asking God to show Him how He brings things back to life, are a type of addendum to *āyat al-kursī* which gives three specific examples of the levels of God’s leading the believers “from darkness to light”. Without directly using the language of *’irfān*, Ṭabāṭabā’ī connects the three verses to examples of the well-known stations of certainty called *’ilm al-yaqīn*, *’ayn al-yaqīn* and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*. The station of Abraham is that of “guidance to the truth and a clarification of how things are by being shown their reality and the cause from which the newly originated things (*ḥawādith*) flow. In other words this guidance is by being shown the cause and effect

²² M 7:177.

²³ Q 2:260.

together-the firmest degree of guidance...” Instead of the usual parable of fire Ṭabāṭabā’ī uses the more mundane example of cheese to describe these three levels of certainty. Someone who has never seen cheese may doubt its existence, but his doubt can be ameliorated by the testimony of a trustworthy person who has seen and tasted it. Better still, the doubt could be removed by someone giving the person a piece for tasting. Most persuasive of all, a cheese maker could show how cheese is made and then provide a sample of the finished product.²⁴

Ṭabāṭabā’ī posits two possible understandings of Abraham’s questioning God to show him “how he brings the dead back to life”. The first would be that Abraham is asking how the dead limbs and bodies can be revived when they are scattered like dust. The question would then be directed to God’s omnipotence. The second and preferred way to understand the question is concerning the precise way God effuses (*ifādah*) life on the dead in which case Abraham would be asking about the cause and the ‘how’ of His influence on the dead. Ṭabāṭabā’ī argues that the second understanding is preferable because firstly Abraham asks how God gives life (*tūhyī*) to the dead, not how dead limbs can accept life (which would have to read *tahyī*); secondly if the question were how the dead accept life and not how they are given life, there would be no point in God commanding Abraham himself to call the birds so as to revive them; and thirdly if the question were concerning divine omnipotence, it would be more appropriate to evoke the divine name the Omnipotent at the end of the verse rather the all-Mighty and all-Wise. Ṭabāṭabā’ī comments that Abraham’s questioning about the “how” of the revival of the dead then relates in a certain way to the *malakūt* of things described in the last verses of

²⁴ M 2:363.

Sūrat Yāsīn, specifically the divine creative command to ‘be’ and the ‘showing of the *malakūt*’ in Sūrat al-An‘ām. “From here and what has been previously mentioned it is apparent that Abraham was not asking to witness by his outer senses how the dead parts of the birds accept life after losing it, rather he was only asking to witness the very act of God and His command in reviving the dead, which is not a sensual matter...[in other words] he was only asking for true certainty (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*).” Needless to say, this certainty is not an ordinary certainty produced by mental concepts and rational arguments but the certainty described in the Qur’an as the vision of the heart (*baṣīrah*) and by the ‘*urafā*’ as tasting (*dhawq*) or witnessing (*shuhūd*).

Another indication that the *malakūt* is a spiritual, not material, realm is found in the *āyat al-rūḥ*.²⁵ Here the Spirit, whatever its actual nature, is said to come from the command of the Lord (*min amri rabbī*), and although some exegetes have tried to read the verse as a discouragement to delve into theoretical matters, Ṭabāṭabā’ī argues that it is really an explanation of the origin of the Spirit, which literally derives from *amr Allāh*, the realm of the immediate divine creative command of ‘be’ mentioned in the last two verses of Sūrat Yāsīn.

Another question posed by the verse of the divine treasures mentioned at the beginning of the chapter relates to the meaning of “a fixed measure”? Through what has been explained of the ‘Allāmah’s tafsir methodology it can be concluded that the treasures themselves are immaterial, related to higher spiritual realms close to God and His names; they are the location for the divine creative order of “be”. The witnessing of this realm brings absolute certainty about God’s omnipotence, and everything witnessed in the

²⁵ Q 17:85.

physical world also exists at that level in an appropriate spiritual manner. The bringing down of the treasures in a fixed measure must therefore refer to the gradual, material creation of all the things in the treasures. This is supported by the linguistic definitions of *qadar* and *taqdīr*, namely the molding and fixing of an object into a specific form. The treasures are brought down through God’s manifestation from the *malakūt* or *ghayb* to *mulk* or *shahādah* where their existence is fixed by the restraints of time and space.²⁶ Two verses from Sūrat al-Qamar which Ṭabāṭabā’ī identifies as *āyāt al-ghurar* contain a key to the nature of the divine measuring.²⁷ In his commentary on those two verses Ṭabāṭabā’ī comments: “the *qadar* of a thing is its measure which it does not go beyond, its limit (*ḥadd*) and measured shape (*handasah*) which it does not overstep one bit, neither more nor less. He, the Exalted, says ‘and there is not a thing but with Us are its treasures, and We do not send it down but in a fixed measure’. So for every thing there is a fixed limit in terms of its creation which it does not go beyond and an outstretched path in its existence which it travels upon and from which it does not deviate.”²⁸

A few pages later Ṭabāṭabā’ī devotes a separate section to *qadar*, where he elaborates further on its nature, the exact connotation of which has been a controversial issue amongst the various theological schools. Ṭabāṭabā’ī, however, eschews the lengthy *kalamī* debates and examines the issue from the point of view of his tafsir methodology, starting with the Qur’anic view on the issue, then utilizing *riwāyāt* and intellect as guides.

²⁶ That the nature of God’s “sending down” (*tanzīl*), is equivalent to what is called “disclosure” (*tajallī*) in *‘irfān* is an important but separate discussion which Ṭabāṭabā’ī mentions in *Risālat al-Wasā’it* and he alludes to it in M 15:315. One of the ‘Allāmah’s close students verifies that he viewed revelation as *tajallī* (Jawādī Āmulī, *Pirāmūn-i Wahy wa Rahbarī*, 257). The divine *tanzīl* is like the manifestation of the immaterial ideas of a writer through the material means of voice or pen and paper where the descent of the thoughts onto paper does not affect their immaterial existence in the writer’s mind. This is unlike the descent of rain or other material objects which when they descend no longer exist in their original position (*tajāfī*).

²⁷ Q 54:49-50.

²⁸ M 19:88.

He says “*qadar*-and it [literally means] the shape of a thing and the limit of its existence- is something that has been repeatedly mentioned in His speech, the Exalted, regarding the affair of creation. He says: “and there is not a thing but its treasures are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure”. The apparent meaning of this verse indicates that the measuring [of a thing] is concomitant with its sending down from the treasures, which exist near Him, the Exalted. As for the treasures themselves-and they certainly are His original creation (*ibdā'*)-they are not limited by the measuring which accompanies the sending down. So here sending down means its bringing out (*iṣdār*) to this visible realm, as can also be inferred from His other statements “and We have sent down iron” and “and He has sent down for you eight mates of the cattle.” Ṭabāṭabā'ī then quotes two *riwāyāt* from Imam Riḍā which “support this [conclusion]” and which both explicitly equate *qadar* with the defined form and shape of a thing (*al-handasah min- l-tūl wa-l-'araḍ wa-l-baqā'*). Then he draws a related conclusion regarding the meaning of “everything” mentioned in other *āyāt al-qadar* such as “and He created everything, and then determined it in a precise measure”, “the One who gave everything its creation then guided it”.²⁹ The meaning of “everything” in these verses is the “things actually existing in this visible realm of ours from the actually existing physical things (*tabi'iyat*) characterized by creation and composition”. The divine measuring has two levels, one encompassing all other than God, covering every contingent and needy thing, whether material or not, as well as a level specific to our visible world which relates to the limitations on the existence of things in the visible world, specifically the limitations related to the system of causation. Ṭabāṭabā'ī points out that *taqdīr* is part of the divine

²⁹ Q 25:3, 20:50.

system of guidance in creation (*hidāyat takwīnīyah*) exemplified in the verse “the One who created and formed, and the One who measured and guided” and contrasts with its accompanying term *qaḍā’*. *Qaḍā’* is the “final divine decree” illustrated in the verse “and Allah decrees and there is none to repeal His degree” whereas *qadar* depends upon the completion of all related causes and the removal of any obstacles, as described in the verse “Allah effaces and confirms whatever He wishes”. In philosophy what Ṭabāṭabā’ī is describing as *qaḍā’* is called sufficient cause (*‘illat tāmmah*) whereas *qadar* is equivalent to the various preparatory causes and conditions (*muqtadīyāt*) which affect and “mould” a thing’s existence but do not in of themselves necessitate its existence. At the end of the discussion he points this out by commenting that “what we have proposed [as to the meaning of *qadar* and *qaḍā’*] is also affirmed by discursive reasoning (*baḥth ‘aqli*).” Utilizing the language of philosophy, he equates *qadar* with “[the] compound causes such as that of agent, matter, preconditions, preparatory causes and obstacles” and *qaḍā’* with “the complete sufficient cause.”

The discussions of the above topics, like the reality and nature of the visible and invisible realms, the divine command and the divine measuring, are also found in a different form in Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s treatise *Risālat al-Wasā’it*, written in his native village before moving to Qum. This treatise is significant in that it addresses the same fundamental philosophical and theological issues presented throughout *al-Mīzān*, especially the divine names and acts and man’s spiritual journey from origin to return. The key difference with the *Rasā’il*, however, is that it is not a tafsir but closer to a work of *kalām* in the spirit and style of the *ḥikmah* writings of Mullā Ṣadrā and his students. *Risālat al-Wasā’it* “is a brief discourse concerning the intermediaries existing between

Allah, immaculate is He, and the natural realm which Allah brings into being over and over. It [the treatise] is according to what can be obtained by rational demonstrations (*burhān*) and reaffirmed by spiritual unveilings (*kashf*) as well as what is understood from the apparent religious teachings (*ẓawāhir dīnīyah*) of the Book and Sunnah.”³⁰ Here we see immediately that Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s employs the *hawzah* axiom “the inseparability of the Qur’an, *burhān* and ‘*irfān*” but unlike *al-Mizān* the tone is more explicitly philosophic and mystical. For example he starts the treatise with a section referring to a previous treatise concerning how in ‘*ilm al-tawhīd* it is proven that “the externally existing contingent’s things are all effects and disclosures of the Necessary Existent, who is the sheer reality”. Here the language and tone is unmistakably Sadrian; terms such as *wujūd wājibī*, *ma‘ālīl*, *mazāhīr*, *ḥaqīqat ṣīrfah*, *ta‘ayyunāt*, abound. Ṭabāṭabā’ī, after discussing the types and levels of existence, concludes that there are four macrocosms: the realm of the divine names and attributes, which is also called *lāhūt*, the realm of complete immateriality, called the realm of the intellect, spirit or *jabarūt*, the realm of images called the imaginal realm or the realm of suspended forms, *barzakh*, or *malakūt*, and finally the realm of physical nature also called *nāsūt*. Here as well the terms ‘*ālam al-lahūt*, *mithāl*, and *nāsūt*, are strongly philosophical-mystical and initially there is no mention made of Qur’anic verses or hadith.

In the second section Ṭabāṭabā’ī submits proofs from the Qur’an and the Sunnah that the divine names are intermediaries in the ontological descent (*tanzīl al-wujūd*). If someone reflects and considers numerous Qur’anic verses he will immediately see how God explains His specific names with general names, or whenever He describes His

³⁰ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *al-Rasā’il al-Tawhīdīyah*. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Nu’mān, 1419/1999), 101.

maintenance of creation He uses appropriate names like *Ḥayy* or *Qayyūm*. In the Sunnah, especially the supplications of the Prophet and Imams, there is a similar pattern of calling upon divine names appropriate to the situation. In everyday life a sick person would call upon God by His name the Healer, not the One who causes death, or someone looking for subsistence would call upon the name the Provider, not the One who takes. Ṭabāṭabā'ī then lists numerous hadith from the authoritative sources reaffirming the importance of the divine names as intermediaries in creation. Turning specifically to the intermediary macrocosms of the *jabarūt* and *malakūt*, he says:

Among that which proves [the existence of the intermediary realms between that of the divine names and the physical world] is the verse ‘and there is not a thing but with Us are its sources and We do not descend it except by a fixed measure.’ This verse, by the generality of its wording, shows that all things existing in this world also possess existence in the ‘treasures’-an existence of unlimited and unmeasured vastness. The apparent meaning of the verse is that the measuring only occurs because of their descent, but it is not a descent of withdrawal (*tajāfin*) from one place to another, since He says ‘what is with you will be spent, but what is with him is permanent’.³¹

In other words, everything possesses both a face facing God and a face facing creation; the latter face since it possesses a certain measure is limited by image (*maḥdūd mithālī*) while the verse “and there is not a thing but it is with Us” shows that there is another face which is neither limited nor measured. Similarly, it is clear that for this world of ours there also exists a divine face that is measured, yet lasting- the *‘ālam al-mithāl*-as well as

³¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

a permanent divine face free of any measurements—the *‘ālam al-‘aql wa-l-tajarrud*.

Risālāt al-Wasā’iṭ, then, is an important preliminary for understanding the philosophical and theological discussions in *al-Mizān*, as well as the key role of the *āyāt al-ghurar*. The difference in *al-Mizān*, however, was that there the ‘Allāmah was aiming primarily to delimit the boundaries of an authentic tafsir based on the Qur’an from an invalid one based on conjecture. This style, while already present in the writings of Mullā Ṣadrā and his students, did not have a noticeable impact on the exegetical and theological writings of most of the Shī‘ī scholars before Ṭabāṭabā’ī. Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s teaching and writing in Qum, however, was a principal factor in the ongoing transformation of not only the exegetical and philosophical style of the following generation of *hawzah* scholars but also in theological and ethical matters. In the final chapter attention will be brought to the impact of *al-Mizān* on contemporary Shī‘ī exegesis as well as Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s overall influence on the contemporary *hawzah* milieu.

Chapter Seven:
After *al-Mizān*

Thematic Tafsir

In the field of tafsir perhaps the most significant trend after *al-Mizān* in the *hawzah* has been the emergence of thematic tafsir (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī*). The methodology of tafsir of the Qurʾan by Qurʾan, with its emphasis on the internal harmony and consistency of the Qurʾanic verses, naturally lends itself to systematic examinations of various subjects based upon all relevant verses. Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr, contemporary with Ṭabāṭabāʿī but teaching in Najaf, first proposed this approach in a series of lectures on the Qurʾan and history in the late 1970s, a few years after the completion of *al-Mizān*.¹ Ṣadr begins the first essay on why exegetes should focus on a thematic approach to the Qurʾan, in much the same tone that Ṭabāṭabāʿī promoted tafsir of the Qurʾan by Qurʾan in the prologue of *al-Mizān*.² He mentions the various hermeneutics prevalent in Islamic intellectual history, such as the philosophical, literary or hadith approaches. Echoing Ṭabāṭabāʿī in the introduction to *al-Mizān*, Ṣadr laments that these approaches usually result in the exegete imposing his specialization on the Qurʾan, and points out that in contrast to these approaches there exists a hermeneutics which is “impartial” and “lets the Qurʾan speak for itself” (*istināq*). This is very likely an allusion to Ṭabāṭabāʿī’s method

¹ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, *al-Madrasat al-Qurʾāniyah: al-Sunan al-Taʾrikiyah fi-l-Qurʾān*. (Beirut: Dār al-Taʾaruf, 1409/1989).

² Although the present writer is not aware of any written evidence that Ṣadr read *al-Mizān*, given the fact that both he and Ṭabāṭabāʿī were prominent Shīʿī scholars writing on similar topics around the same time it is reasonably certain that Ṣadr was aware of *al-Mizān* and Ṭabāṭabāʿī’s hermeneutics. In an important discussion on *al-Mizān* between a student of Ṣadr and another writer the questioner quotes Ṣadr without source as having said “the course of Shīʿah tafsir was at a standstill from the time of Ṭabarī [Ṭabarsī?] until the author of *al-Mizān* came and revived it,” Kassār, *al-Manhaj al-ʿAqāʿidī*, 71.

of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an which was partially inspired by the hadith of Imam 'Alī, "one part speaks for another." However, Ṣadr takes a different angle on the methodology and highlights two possible approaches to tafsir, one which looks at the Qur'an one verse at a time, starting with the first *sūrah* and going sequentially through all the others, and another which interprets a specific topic keeping all relevant verses in mind. The first style he calls the "atomistic approach" (*ittijāh tajzī'ī*), the second the "unity-based" or thematic method (*ittijāh tawhīdī aw mawḍū'ī*).³ The first method, used by all prominent exegetes from Ṭabarī onwards, stops at each verse as it appears in the Qur'an and considers various literary and semantic issues. Usually called the sequential approach (*tartībī*), Ṣadr's choice of the term "atomistic" for this format reveals his deep reservations regarding its effectiveness in allowing the Qur'an to fully speak for itself. His main argument is that the atomistic style is inherently a piecemeal and myopic way to perform tafsir. The alternative style, the thematic approach, takes into consideration specific theological or sociological questions and answers them through a "collective" reading of the Qur'an.

While Ṭabāṭabā'ī made a significant advance by contesting the received wisdom that an authentic tafsir should practically rely on non-Qur'anic texts, particularly hadith, Ṣadr goes further and questions whether even the sequential format is the best way to "let the Book speak for itself." Here we can sense Ṣadr's concern shared with Ṭabāṭabā'ī, for the reevaluation of important theological and sociological issues in the light of a fresh, but tempered, reading of the Book. While Ṭabāṭabā'ī was first concerned with writing a sequential tafsir based on firm knowledge, Ṣadr proposed addressing theological issues

³ al-Ṣadr, *al-Madrasat al-Qur'ānīyah*, 28.

directly by thematic tafsir. Of course, Ṭabāṭabā'ī was fully aware of various theological, philosophical, and sociological issues, yet his view was that before it is possible to adequately address such issues there must be an authentic tafsir of each *āyah*. In other words, for the author of *al-Mīzān* exegesis of the Qur'an by the Qur'an is the required first step in formulating an authentic and profound interpretation of the *uṣūl al-dīn*; hence his addition of many philosophical, sociological, historical and narrative discussions after the *bayān* section. Ṣadr argues that thematic tafsir is the logical conclusion for this project of renewal of tafsir in particular and Islamic thought in general. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's and Ṣadr's approach to renewal and *ijtihād* in the Islamic disciplines lies in striking a dynamic balance between the static *taqlīd* of those scholars who unnecessarily confine themselves to overly literal interpretations of solitary hadith and the facile approach of those modernists who seek to replace haphazardly the Islamic intellectual tradition with contemporary trends. This balance is an important development in contemporary Shī'ī theology which continues today, mostly with Ṭabāṭabā'ī's intellectual successors.

Ṣadr opines that one of the major reasons for the overall stagnant state of *'ilm al-tafsīr* is the restriction to the sequential approach. This approach is limited by nature because the exegete's vision is confined to one or two verses at a time, and although occasionally such an "atomistic" exegete may draw on other verses, the main concern is the literal signification (*madlūl lafzī*) of the verse at hand. Even if he is successful in gaining a large amount of Qur'anic knowledge, he is still left with "a massive conglomeration of disconnected facts".⁴ The piecemeal approach accidentally (*bi-l-'araḍ*), not essentially, uncovers the Qur'anic view regarding various important issues in

⁴ *Ibid.* 30.

daily life. Ṣadr reiterates another important criticism of Ṭabāṭabā'ī regarding the classical atomistic reading of the Qur'an, namely that it tends to reinforce rather than resolve disputes between different schools of thought. A classic example is the thorny question of free will or predetermination, where each faction vociferously proclaims those verses supporting their position. Here again Ṣadr is taking Ṭabāṭabā'ī hermeneutical reevaluation and going further; not only is the traditional *riwā'ī* based methodology an impediment in the advancement of Qur'anic knowledge, but the very format of sequential tafsir is counterproductive. An exegete who restricts himself to a sequential tafsir inevitably undertakes a passive interpretation of the Book; each *āyah* presents certain well-defined linguistic or semantic questions and the exegete answers accordingly. By contrast, in the thematic approach the exegete takes the urgent questions and asks them of the Book, and what ensues is an active “dialogue” between the exegete and Qur'an. For Ṣadr, this dialogue is the essence of *istintāq al-Qur'ān*, which he calls “the most wonderful way of describing the activity of thematic tafsir as a dialogue with the Qur'an...”⁵

In his essay, Ṣadr makes explicit the comparison, implicit in *al-Mizān*, between proper tafsir and *'ilm al-fiqh*. No *faqīh* would start with page one of the canonical hadith books and go forward until he stumbles upon each hadith relevant to the legal question at hand. Even a strict *muḥaddith* would start first with the legal questions presented by an inquirer (*mustaftī*), and then proceed to collect all the hadith necessary to produce a fatwa. In other words, the approach of the *fuqahā'* towards hadith has been the legal equivalent of thematic tafsir, and Ṣadr points out that this might be a reason why *'ilm al-*

⁵ *Ibid.* 35.

fiqh is currently more developed and dynamic than *'ilm al-tafsīr*.⁶ Keeping in mind the differences of goals and sources between the two fields, a *mufasssīr* plays a similar role to a *faqīh*.

Ṣadr's invocation of *ijtihād* in *fiqh* as a precedent for thematic tafsir is especially revealing. This writer has tried to illustrate how Ṭabāṭabā'ī sought a path of tempered renewal and valid *ijtihād* in tafsir. While Ṭabāṭabā'ī did not deliberately use *fiqhī* terminology to describe what he was trying to accomplish in *al-Mizān*, he came very close to doing so when he used phrases like *tadabbur*, *tafakkur* or *ta'aqqul* as near synonyms for "ijtihād in tafsir". Regardless of the terminology, renewal and *ijtihād* in tafsir and philosophy was the 'Allāmah's stated purpose for taking residence in the *hawzah* of Qum, and an approach of tempered *ijtihād* and renewal is found in all his major writings, especially *al-Mizān*. Ṭabāṭabā'ī might have shied away from using explicit comparisons of renewal in *'ilm al-tafsīr* with the Uṣūlī concept of the validity and necessity of continuous legal *ijtihād* because of his background, specialization or even personal temperament. First and foremost he was a philosopher, and philosophy was often looked at askance by the *fuqahā'*. Ṣadr, however, was primarily a *faqīh* and a well-known *marja' al-taqlīd*. Even before his assassination, he was widely respected in both Qum and Najaf as a prodigious scholar highly skilled in traditional *fiqh* but also actively engaged with contemporary concerns. His books of *fiqh* and *uṣūl*, especially *Durūs fī 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, popularly known as the *Halaqāt*, quickly became standard texts in much the same way as Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah* and *Nihāyat al-Ḥikmah*. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's temperament in writing and speaking was cautious and terse; a close reading of *al-Mizān*

⁶ *Ibid.* 33.

and his philosophy texts shows that he was sparing in his words, and it is also well-known that he was averse to mixing topics. Perhaps this is one reason why he did not fully draw upon the terminology of the separate discipline of *fiqh* in order to describe his hermeneutics. We have seen how Ṭabāṭabā'ī, with a few notable exceptions, purposely eschewed detailed *fiqhī* discussions in *al-Mīzān*, and although he possessed certificates from the most prominent *fuqahā'*, he consciously did not pursue the rank of *marja' al-taqlīd*. Ṣadr, however, actively engaged with contemporary problems and held a position of socio-political leadership in Iraq beyond the traditional *marja'īyah*.

Ṣadr's explicit comparison between *ijtihād* in *tafsīr* and in *fiqh* is significant coming as it does from one of the most important Shī'ī *fuqahā'* of the last century. In the collection of lectures on thematic exegesis, he critically labels the sequential approach as *tafsīr taqlīdī*.⁷ This is an obvious reference to the terminology of *fiqh*; the Uṣūlī scholars state that every mature Muslim must either be a mujtahid or a follower of one.⁸ While the vast majority of Shī'ī scholars say that *taqlīd* is valid or even preferable in the *furū' al-dīn*, in the *uṣūl al-dīn* it is forbidden.⁹ A true *tafsīr*, then, must be the opposite of *taqlīdī*, namely dynamic (*mubdi'*) and based on sound *ijtihād*. Ṣadr is reiterating Ṭabāṭabā'ī's criticism of the Muslims scholars in general, and the Shī'ah in particular, for their lack of effort in developing *tafsīr* with the same depth and vigor as *fiqh*. Like the 'Allāmah, Ṣadr would definitely agree that restricting *tafsīr* to *hadīth* is "halting

⁷ *Ibid*, 45.

⁸ Whether the Akhbārīs said that every *mukallaf* must only be a *muqallid* of the infallible Imams has been challenged by Gleave. The majority of Akhbārīs said that the *mukallaf* must either be knowledgeable in the *hadīth* or follow a *faqīh* who is. In practice they practiced *ijtihād*, albeit with a limited range. See Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt. Two Theories of Shī'ī Jurisprudence*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000.

⁹ For example as it is stated in the first question (*mas'alah*) of the collected practical laws of twelve contemporary *marāji'*; *Tawdīh al-Masā'il-i Marāji'*. Compiled by Bānī Hāshimī Khuymanī, Iḥsān Uṣūlī, *et al.* 2 vols. (Daftar Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1378 SH), 13-5.

knowledge in its tracks,”¹⁰ but he would also add the same caveat for sequential tafsir. In fact, he blames the historical predominance of *tafsir bi-l-riwāyāt* as one factor in keeping tafsir at the atomistic stage.¹¹

Although Ṣadr lived only long enough to give one brief series of lectures on thematic tafsir, a number of other *ḥawzah* scholars, many of them Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s students, have taken up the idea more fully in practice. The contemporary *marja’ al-taqlīd*, Nāṣir Makārim Shirāzī, who translated some of *al-Mizān* into Persian at Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s request, has a series in Arabic, written in collaboration with a committee of scholars, called *Nafahāt al-Qur’ān*.¹² In the introduction, he gives a brief description of the history and importance of thematic tafsir. He points out that thematic tafsir has deep roots in Islamic intellectual history, albeit mostly in *fiqh*. Going back as the fourth century after the Hijrah, there have been works entitled *āyāt al-aḥkām* in which all the Qur’anic verses related to each of the various chapters of *fiqh*, beginning with *ṭahārah*, are collected and analyzed according to the legal *madhhab* of the author. Makārim Shirāzī cites *Bihār al-Anwār* as an early example of thematic tafsir performed by a Shī’ī scholar. At the beginning of each chapter ‘Allāmah Majlisī first cites all the *āyāt* relevant to the topic of that chapter before presenting the hadith. This is obviously a formative stage in thematic tafsir since Majlisī does not offer any *ijtihād* as to how they relate to the topic or even any tafsir of his own of those *āyāt*; he only collects the *āyahs* themselves and occasionally quotes the relevant commentary from *Majma’ al-Bayān* or *Tafsir Baydāwī*. Two other prominent students of Tabataba’i who have a series of *tafsir mawḍū’ī* are Ja‘far Subḥānī,

¹⁰ M 3:99.

¹¹ al-Ṣadr, *al-Madrasat al-Qur’ānīyah*, 31.

¹² Nāṣir Makārim Shirāzī, *Nafahāt al-Qur’ān*. 10 vols.
<<http://www.makaremshirazi.org/books/arabic.htm>>.

a theologian who translated *Uṣūl-i Falsafah* into Arabic, and perhaps his most prominent student in tafsir, ‘Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī, whose works will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

Sequential Tafsirs

Following *al-Mizān*, there has also been noteworthy activity in the *ḥawzah* in sequential exegesis. Started five years after the completion of *al-Mizān*, perhaps the first is the incomplete *al-Furqān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi-l-Qur’ān wa-l-Sunnah* of Muḥammad Ṣādiqī Tihirānī.¹³ In the introduction to *al-Furqān*, the influence of *al-Mizān*, if not its name, is immediately apparent. Even Ṣādiqī’s terse and laconic Arabic echoes Ṭabāṭabā’ī, although with respect to content his style is less academic, and he eschews separate historical, philosophical or theological discussions. On the first page Ṣādiqī champions tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an and extensively quotes the same *āyāt* and *riwāyāt* which the ‘Allāmah used to support it. One distinctive feature of *al-Furqān* is that although it is in the traditional sequential format, the author deliberately starts with the last *sūrah* and works his way backward. The author explains that since the topics covered in the last, mainly Meccan, *sūrahs* “comprehensively cover what the novice needs to understand in terms the [foundations] of Islam” he felt it would be best to start there. It is true that glancing at the lengthy sequential tafsirs, the *mufasssīrīn* are generally seen to go into much detail in the first few lengthy *sūrahs* but by the time they reach the later short *sūrahs* they devote less commentary to them.

¹³ Muḥammad al-Ṣādiqī Tihirānī, *al-Furqān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi-l-Qur’ān wa-l-Sunnah*. 4 vols [?]. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-‘Alamī, 1397/1977). There is little biographical information available on Ṣādiqī. Originally from Isfāhan, he studied in the *ḥawzah* of Najaf before returning to his home town to teach. He wrote some polemical books against atheism and Christianity, Muḥammad Hādī al-Amīnī, *Mu’jam Rijāl al-Fikr wa-l-Adab fī-l-Najaf: Khilāl Alf ‘Āmm*. 3 vols. (n.p, n.p, 1413/1992), 2:789.

Another noteworthy, although also apparently uncompleted, sequential tafsir after *al-Mīzān* is *Mawāhib al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* by ‘Abd al-A‘la Sabzawārī (d. 1414/1993). As his name indicates Sabzawārī was from Sabzawār in Iran, and as with many Iranian seminary students, early on he migrated to Najaf to study with the major *fuqahā’* there. Some of his teachers in *fiqh* included Ṭabāṭabā‘ī’s teachers, most prominently Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā’inī and Abū-l-Ḥasan Iṣfahānī. Like Ṭabāṭabā‘ī and many of his successors, Sabzawārī believed that a disproportionate amount of time was spent in the *ḥawzah* on theoretical *fiqh*, and that more energy should be spent on tafsir and *uṣūl al-dīn*. To this end he wrote a two volume summary of the practical aspects of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, appropriately called *Tahdhīb al-Uṣūl*. For a short time after the demise of Abū-l-Qasim Khū‘ī, he became the principal *marja’ al-taqlīd* in Najaf, but because of his opposition to the Baathist regime he was forced into house confinement until his passing. Besides specializing in *fiqh*, Sabzawārī also wrote on other Islamic disciplines and wrote extensive notes (*ḥawāshī*) on various classic books of hadith and tafsir.¹⁴ Although the title of one of Sabzawārī’s works, *Ifādat al-Bārī’ fī Naqd mā Allafa al-Ḥakīm [Hādī] al-Sabzawārī*, could indicate that he had a negative attitude towards philosophy, what is clear from the numerous “philosophical and mystical discussions” in his tafsir is that he did not wholly reject those disciplines but took exception to certain aspects of them. In the *Mawāhib* he even invokes a rational principle from “divine transcendent theosophy” (*al-falsafat al-ilāhīyat al-muta‘ālīyah*).¹⁵

¹⁴ Muḥammad al-Gharawī, *Ma‘a ‘Ulamā’ al-Najaf al-Ashraf*. 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqalayn, 14), 2:532.

¹⁵ ‘Abd al-A‘la al-Sabzawārī, *Mawāhib al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*. 4 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat Ahl al-Bayt, 1409/1988), 1:12. This attitude of cautious acceptance of Sadrian philosophy is found among many contemporary Shī‘ī *fuqahā’*. Perhaps an important reason for this is that the standard *ḥawzah* text of advanced *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *Kifāyat al-Uṣūl*, was written by the philosopher and *faqīh* Muḥammad Kāzīm

While Sabzawārī never explicitly names Ṭabāṭabā’ī, it is clear from his introduction that he was in some way impacted by *al-Mizān* and also sought to “let the book speak for itself”. He says “what is apparent to me after viewing a number of tafsirs is that every group of scholars interprets the Qur’an by means of that with which they are familiar. So the philosophers and theologians interpret it by their own schools of thought derived from the opinions of philosophy and theology...” Then Sabzawārī enumerates the different groups in the same way as Ṭabāṭabā’ī did in the prologue to *al-Mizān*, finally ending with this crucial point “but [the Qur’an] also interprets itself by itself, because it is ‘a clarification for every thing’ and since it is so, it is most fitting that it be a clarification for itself...”¹⁶ The overall format of the *Mawāhib* is strikingly reminiscent of *al-Mizān*; the main tafsir section consists first of a set of connected verses followed by a brief overview of their main theme, and finally the tafsir of each individual verse’s apparent meaning. Like Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sabzawārī separates the hadith, literary, philosophical and legal discussions also placing them after the main tafsir section. As might be expected from an eminent *faqīh*, he also adds many *fiqhī* discussions. A distinctive feature of the *Mawāhib* is the author’s special attention to the lexical meaning of key words which he attempts to define in the most comprehensive and succinct way. For example, after explaining the two well-known derivations for the word *ism* as either “height” (*rif’ah*) or “mark” (*’alāmah*), he concludes that each of these meanings can be linked to the other by means of what he calls a “comprehensive and approximate definition” (*jāmi’ qarīb*), namely the word “appearance” (*burūz*) and “manifestation” (*zuhūr*). This is because height has connotations of mark and vice versa and both can be

Khurasānī (d.1329/1911). In general, contemporary Shī’ī *uṣūl al-fiqh*, like its *kalām*, is strongly influenced by Sadriān thought.

¹⁶ al-Sabzawārī, *Mawāhib al-Rahmān*, 1:6.

traced back to the words appearing and manifesting. He concludes by noting:

The habit of the lexicographers, literary men, and the exegetes who follow them has been to make many different examples (*maṣādiq*) out of one word even though a comprehensive and approximate word for those various meanings is available. Because of this they increase the meanings of the word, unaware of the underlying meaning which all those [contrived] words revert to. It would have been better for them [the lexicographers, literary men and exegetes] to expend effort to clarify the comprehensive and approximate word and the underlying meaning from which that word derives, so that the discipline of lexicography (*‘ilm al-lughah*) would become more useful than it is at present and the subject of homonyms (*mushtarak lafẓī*) would vanish, except in rare instances. Perhaps the reason for their lack of attention to this matter is that mentioning words and their various usages is very easy compared to seeking the ‘comprehensive and approximate word’ from which those words derive.¹⁷

In other words, despite the diversity of verbal utterances (*alfāz*) and their possible applications (*isti‘mālāt*), there still usually exists one foundational and underlying meaning (*mafhūm*) which unites them all, the *jāmi‘ qarīb*. This could be seen as a continuation of what Ṭabāṭabā’ī, and before him Fayḍ Kāshānī, were attempting with the *mutashābih* verses, although for Sabzawārī the principle applies to all lexicography, not only terms relevant to theology.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:10.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's Legacy in the *Hawzah*

Probably the most representative student of Ṭabāṭabā'ī who has continued his efforts for renewal and *ijtihād* in *tafsir*, philosophy and theology in the *hawzah* is 'Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī. Born in 1933 in northern Iran, after studying the introductory *hawzah* courses in his hometown he went to Tehran to pursue higher studies with two of the major philosophers and mystics of the time, Abu-l-Ḥasan Sha'rānī and Mahdī Ilāhī Qumshā'ī. Around the same time Ṭabāṭabā'ī migrated to Qum, Jawādī Āmulī also went there to finish his advanced studies. Besides reading the *Asfār* and the *Ilāhīyāt* of Ibn Sīnā with the 'Allāmah, he also attended the advanced *fiqh* classes of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Burūjirdī and Muḥammad Muḥaqqiq Mīr Damād. Jawādī Āmulī also studied theoretical mysticism and exegesis under Ṭabāṭabā'ī until the 'Allāmah's semi-retirement in the mid 1970s.

Besides advanced lectures on the *Asfār* and Qayṣarī's commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Jawādī Āmulī has two continuing series of *tafsirs* written in Persian, one in the traditional sequential format called *Tasnīm: Tasfīr-i Qur'ān-i 'Azīm*, another in the thematic style. Each volume of the *mawḍū'ī* *tafsir*, currently at about twelve volumes, consists of a theological topic, as portrayed in the Qur'an. The first volume concerns "the Qur'an in the Qur'an", the second "God in the Qur'an", and so forth. His *tartībī* *tafsir* already comprises about eight volumes but has not reached the end of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*. Since each volume ranges from 700 to 800 pages, *Tasnīm* may prove to be the most extensive Shī'ī *tafsir* to date, and certainly the most in-depth in terms of the mystical-philosophical issues presented in the Qur'an. The introduction to *Tasnīm* contains a detailed description of the various ways of exegesis, starting with *tafsir* of the

Qur'an by the Qur'an and its proofs as well as replies to common objections to it.¹⁸ In the prologue, which could easily stand alone as a treatise on *'ilm al-tafsīr*, Jawādī Āmulī details a foundation for Qur'anic hermeneutics, an *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, explaining and expanding upon Ṭabāṭabā'ī's methodology. After commenting that the language of the Qur'an is the same as the "language of the innate human nature" (*zabān-i fiṭrat*) and how and why the Qur'an differs in style and substance from other books of wisdom or history, Jawādī Āmulī argues without much ado that the fact that the Qur'an is light does not mean that it has no need of exegesis, nor on the other hand is it so complicated that it cannot be understood at any level. Like Ṭabāṭabā'ī, he laments that although the Qur'an stands in need of proper commentary, "until the fifth century of the Hijrah, other than tafsīr by hadith, another style using critical study (*tafsīr-i dirā'ī*) and ijtihad was not current, except in the form of [superficial] ijtihad in literary and linguistic issues, as seen in the reports of the *salaf*."¹⁹

In the next section of the prologue, Jawādī Āmulī looks at the sources of tafsīr, commenting in true Ṭabāṭabā'ī spirit that "tafsīr of the Qur'an without knowledge and before investigation and research is condemnable" and that "it is necessary to investigate what are the sources for *'ilm al-tafsīr* as well as what are the principles of investigation and research for obtaining Qur'anic knowledge (*ma'ārif*), since tafsīr without researching those principles is eisegesis and condemnable, while tafsīr using those principles is exegesis by critical study and praiseworthy."²⁰ The prologue of *Tasnīm* is divided into four parts, one concerning tafsīr of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, one on tafsīr by the Sunnah, one on tafsīr by intellect, and one on tafsīr by *ra'y*. The most space is reserved for the

¹⁸ 'Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Tasnīm: Tafsīr-i Qur'ān-i 'Azīm*. 8 vols. (Qum: Isrā', 1378 SH), 1:52-229.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 1:56.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 1:56-7.

first style, with a number of detailed discussions on its proofs and examples as well as replies to common objections. It is likely that this section is the most thorough discussion of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, and certainly the most important since Ṭabāṭabā'ī's discussion in *al-Mīzān*'s prologue and the discussion of *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y* in Volume Three. In words that could have easily come from Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Jawādī Āmulī dismisses *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y* as “not really tafsir, but rather application (*taṭbīq*) or eisegesis (*taḥmīl-i ra'y bar Qur'ān*),” taking Ṭabāṭabā'ī's position that all tafsir based upon ignorance is none other than *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*, opposed to both theoretical and practical intellect.²¹ Also reflecting Ṭabāṭabā'ī's approach to philosophy and reason in tafsir, Jawādī Āmulī comments that '*aql* must employ firm demonstrative proofs (*burhān*), and remain protected from the danger of fallacious arguments (*mughālaṭah*). It is not reason's role in tafsir to impose elaborate philosophical theories onto the Qur'an, but to act as an arbitrator between conflicting interpretations of the *zāwahir al-āyāt*, as mentioned in Chapter Five.

Explaining why tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an is the most effective hermeneutics, he says that the Qur'an is an independent proof for explaining the basic teachings of Islam (*khuṭūṭ-i kullī-yi ma'ārif*), citing the verses which call the Qur'an a light and explanation for everything as a proof for this. A light and clarification for all things must first be clear and clarifying for itself before it can be so for others. The Sunnah, however, depends on the Qur'an, both in its basic probative force (*ḥujjiyat*) as well as in distinguishing the authentic from inauthentic. The intellect, the other important tool of the *mufassir*, is a lamp illuminating the path of revelation; it cannot replace its

²¹ *Ibid.* 1:176.

teachings which largely deal with the unseen. In any case, tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an was the practical conduct (*sīra-yi 'amali*) of the Infallibles, and Jawādī Āmulī cites three hadith related to *fiqh* by way of illustration.²²

He also replies to some objections to tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, most of which appear to originate from traditionally minded Shī'ah who misconstrue the methodology as "separation of the *thaqalayn* [the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt]". In general, Jawādī Āmulī replies that if what the critics mean by the Ahl al-Bayt is the various *riwāyāt* narrated on their authority, than that is a different affair than the Ahl al-Bayt themselves, since "that which has been affirmed as equal to the Qur'an in the noble *thaqalayn* hadith is the [Prophet's] Family (*'itrat*), not solitary narrations." As shown in Chapter Three, most hadith are solitary and do not alone give the required conviction that they originated from an infallible source. It is also an affirmed teaching of the Ahl al-Bayt that since the Qur'an is an arbitrator for *riwāyāt*, any narration which conflicts with the Qur'an must be discarded. If what these critics intend, however, is the inner reality (*bātin*) of the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt, however, it is true that knowledge in its entirety is only with them. However, "gaining benefit from the apparent meanings of the *āyāt* in order to delineate the general religious teachings (*kullīyāt-i dīn*), while observing the due conditions, is within the reach of all."²³ When it comes to understanding the general message of the Qur'an, the Prophet is not a reference for unquestioning imitation (*marāji'-i ta'abbudī*) but rather "an aware teacher and well-informed exegete" (*mu'allim-i āgāh wa mufasssīr-i khabīr*). Here there is also a clear reference to Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view of

²² *Ibid.* 1:69-70. For example Imam Bāqir was asked about how the phrase "there is no sin on you" in the verse concerning the shortening of prayer in travel and danger signifies obligation, not choice. He replies with another verse concerning the order to circumambulate the Ka'bah during Hajj, accepted by scholars as an obligatory act, which contains the same wording "there is no sin upon you".

²³ *Ibid.* 1:75.

the role of the Infallible in tafsir, as teachers, not *marāja‘ al-taqlīd*, who comprehensively understand the Qur’an yet still encourage their followers to ponder using their infallible knowledge as a guide.

Finally, Jawādī Āmulī gives ten examples of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, some of which he calls so simple to grasp that they might not be labeled tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, whereas others are so complicated that only with difficulty could a highly skilled exegete reach them; in fact, there are levels of tafsir which are not at all verbal. Summarizing the possible definitions of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an Jawādī Āmulī notes the term “does not have a lexical definition, nor a ‘revealed meaning’ (*ḥaqīqat-i sha‘rī*) rather [its limits are] “defined” by the depth of the exegete...”²⁴ As a basic example of the methodology, he cites some *āyāt* where the mention of a word, such as a subject or object, agent or act, condition or apodosis, is omitted and other *āyāt* throw light on the elided word. In Sūrat al-A‘rāf, verse 73, the verb “We sent” is elided in the phrase “and to [the people of] Thamūd, Ṣāliḥ, their brother”. The missing verb can be derived from verse 59 of the same *sūrah* where a similar phrase with the missing verb is included, “Certainly We sent Nūḥ to his people”. Another example of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an based on linguistic and grammatical considerations is the controversial issue of specifying who are the Ahl al-Bayt referred to in *āyat al-tathīr*.²⁵ According to the Shī‘ah, as well as some Sunni interpreters, the Ahl al-Bayt referred to in that verse does not include the Prophet’s wives. One argument for the exclusion of the wives is that the verses preceding *āyat al-tathīr*, which are specifically addressed to the wives, use the feminine plural pronoun (*kunna*), whereas the pronoun used in *āyat*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:111.

²⁵ Q 33:33.

al-taḥhīr is the masculine plural (*kum*), indicating that the group addressed in this verse are distinct from the wives.

A more involved example of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, which Ṭabāṭabā'ī thoroughly presented in *al-Mīzān*, perhaps for the first time in the history of Qur'anic exegesis, is the question of the real identity of Āzar, the "father" of Abraham mentioned in the verse, "When Abraham said to Āzar, his father (*abīhi*), do you take idols for gods?..."²⁶ Putting together the various verses where Abraham addresses his "father" Jawādī Āmulī, following his teacher, concludes that the idol-worshipper mentioned in the above verse is not the biological father of Abraham but one of his close relatives. In other verses, in his confrontation with the idolaters of his tribe, Abraham repeatedly promises to ask forgiveness for his "father" as an incentive for him to abandon idol-worship, but according to another verse "when it became manifest to him [Abraham] that he [Āzar] was an enemy of God, he repudiated him."²⁷ However, in one prayer²⁸ Abraham asks forgiveness of his "progenitors" (*wāliday*), a word which could only refer to his parents. By contrast, the word used in reference to the idol-worshipper could refer to either a father or possibly other close relatives. The contents of the prayer indicate that it was said by Abraham in his old age, after he parted from his tribe and when his children were already born. The conclusion, then, derived from tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, is that Āzar is only figuratively a "father" to Abraham, while his real progenitor, alluded to in the above supplication, was not an idolater.²⁹ The verse of

²⁶ Q 6:74.

²⁷ Q 9:114.

²⁸ Q 14:35-41.

²⁹ In some *riwāyāt* Abraham's father is called Tārūkh, while Āzar is identified as an uncle. Ṭabāṭabā'ī says those narrations which mention Āzar as his real father "are in opposition to the Book; they should be paid no heed." M 7:214-5.

Sūrat al-An‘am, then, does not conflict with the belief held by the Shī‘ah and most Sunnis that the parents of prophets are not idol-worshippers.

As an example of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an at the highest level, Jawādī Āmulī mentions the divine viceregency (*khalīfat-i ilāhī*) and beautiful names of God described in the story of Adam.³⁰ Since it could be argued that the ultimate purpose of the revelation of the Qur’an is to train spiritually the Perfect Man (*insān-i kāmīl*) to assume all the divine attributes, all other verses of the Qur’an essentially “interpret” the verse of the divine vice-regency of Adam. That is because they describe the ways to attain that position, namely through the divine names and attributes which are found explicitly or implicitly in every Qur’anic verse.

In the prologue, Jawādī Āmulī also discusses the inner aspect (*bāṭin*) of the Qur’an and makes some noteworthy comments in this regard not articulated by Ṭabāṭabā’ī. In general he is more forthright than his teacher in articulating the mystical aspects of tafsir, who as we have seen was sometimes purposefully reticent in such matters. Just as the topics represented in the *ẓāhir* of the Qur’an, namely those topics which have their basis in concepts, words, and affirmative statements, interpret each other, so too the *bāṭin* of the Qur’an interprets itself. In an insightful statement which summarizes the tools necessary to interpret both those levels, he says “for tafsir of the Qur’an at the outer level two powerful wings are necessary- one is *burhān-i ‘aqlī*, namely acquired knowledge (*‘ilm-i ḥuṣūlī*)..., and the other is the Sunnah of the Infallibles which looks at the topics of tafsir related to the *ẓāhir* of the Qur’an. For tafsir at the inner level two powerful wings are also needed-one is *‘irfān-i qalbī*, namely knowledge by presence

³⁰ Q 2:30.

(*'ilm-i ḥudūrī*), and the other is the Sunnah of the Infallibles which looks at the *bāṭin* of the Qur'an.”

Jawādī Āmulī has also extended the concept of the Qur'an explaining itself to other Islamic disciplines. In a series of lectures on a well-known supplication of the fourth Imam of the Ahl al-Bayt recited in the early mornings of the month of Ramadan, he comments that just as the Qur'an interprets itself, likewise the hadith of the Imams, including their supplications, clarify each other. In the case of the supplication of the fourth Imam, he points out that the famous collection of his supplications, *al-Ṣaḥīfat al-Sajjādīyah*, serves as an excellent resource to interpret and clarify the meanings of his lengthy supplication of the month of Ramadan. In a similar manner to the *āyāt al-ghurar* of *al-Mizān*, he remarks that certain phrases of the supplication, specifically those related to *tawḥīd*, are keys to unlocking its general concepts.³¹ Drawing upon Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hermeneutics one of Jawādī Āmulī's most recent works, *Tafsīr-i Insān ai Insān*, puts forth a new theory that the many dimensions of the human being can be understood by interpreting the human by himself.³² For example, in his opinion the human possesses both *muhkam* as well as *mutashābih* aspects, where the latter must be referred to the former.³³ There are hadith which refer to the infallible Imams as “firm signs” and their opponents as “ambivalent signs”, indicating that the issue is not only hermeneutical but existential. In *Tafsīr-i Insān ba Insān* there is also an argument against interpreting the human “by *ra'y*”; just as in tafsir of the Qur'an, there also must be a source of firm knowledge for “tafsir” of the human being, namely the human being himself.

³¹ Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī, “Sharḥ-i Du'ā-yi Abī Ḥamzah Thumālī”, part one. <http://www.al-shia.com/html/far/10media/media.php?i_d=2>.

³² Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr-i Insān ba Insān: Naẓarīyat-i Jadīd pīrāmūn-i Ma'rifat Shināsī-yi Insān*. (Qum: Isrā', 1384 SH).

³³ *Ibid.* Chapter Three.

In the contemporary *hawzah* another significant proponent of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's tafsir methodology is Kamāl Ḥaydarī. Born in Karbala in 1956, Ḥaydarī studied *dars al-khārij* in the *hawzah* of Najaf with Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr and Abū-l-Qāsim Khū'ī. Because of the Baathist suppression of the *hawzah* of Najaf in the late 1970s, like many Iraqis he migrated to the *hawzah* of Qum where he completed the advanced classes in the rational sciences with three of the most prominent students of the 'Allāmah- Jawādī Āmulī, Muḥammad Miṣbāḥ Yazdī and Ḥasan Ḥasanzādah Āmulī.³⁴ While the latter three disseminate Ṭabāṭabā'ī's methodology predominately among the Persian-speaking seminary students, Ḥaydarī through his lectures and books on tafsir, theology and philosophy is attempting the same among Arabic speakers. Using *al-Mizān* as the main text, he has taught a series of *hawzah*-style lectures on introduction to tafsir as well as tafsir itself.³⁵ In his advanced *kalām* lectures, Ḥaydarī draws upon the standard text *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-I'tiqād* of 'Allāmah Ḥillī and Muḥaqqiq Ṭūsī as frequently as the theological discussions of *al-Mizān*. This is another indication that *al-Mizān* has gained acceptability and recognition as an “official” *hawzah* text. In the *hawzah* there are only a limited number of texts which serve as standard references for lecture courses, and once a text is widely accepted it infrequently finds a replacement. For example, for centuries *Ma'ālim al-Uṣūl*, written by the son of Zayn al-Dīn “Shahīd Thānī” (d. 966/1559), was the standard introductory text in *uṣūl al-fiqh* but Ṣadr's *Halaqāt* has replaced it. Likewise, in philosophy Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *Bidayāt al-Ḥikmah* and *Nihayāt al-Ḥikmah* have superseded Hādī Sabzawārī's *Sharḥ al-Manzūmah*.

³⁴ Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī, “al-Sīrat al-Dhātīyah”. <<http://www.alhaidery.net>>.

³⁵ In the standard lecturing style a prominent teacher (*ustād*) takes a standard text, along with its commentary, analyzes it sentence by sentence and discusses the main arguments for or against each topic (*maṭlab*). A complete reading (*dawrah*) of a text may take several years.

In his lectures and discussions on the importance of *al-Mizān* in the fields of both exegesis as well as theology Ḥaydarī stresses that Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s tafsir, particularly the first five volumes, is intended for seminary-style lecturing (*kitāb darsī*) rather than independent perusal (*muṭāla‘ah*).³⁶ To fully appreciate *al-Mizān*’s depth as well as its relevance to *kalām*, he emphasizes that it is necessary to have at least an introductory background in the rational sciences taught in the *ḥawzah* and even *uṣūl al-fiqh*. As indicated in this dissertation, in the background of *al-Mizān* Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s motivation for letting the *zāhir al-āyāt* speak for themselves is not only to produce an authentic tafsir but ultimately to clarify and better understand major theological issues. Ḥaydarī has published an informative discussion with one of his students on precisely this topic, namely how doctrinal considerations are paramount in *al-Mizān*. He explains that what Ṭabāṭabā’ī intended in *al-Mizān* was a complete and detailed course in Islamic doctrine (*dawrat ‘aqā’id tafṣīliyah*) where the focal point is the Qur’an. He points to the prologue of *al-Mizān* as one proof of this intention. As mentioned in Chapters Two and Six, in the prologue the ‘Allāmah lists seven topics which he says are “fully discussed” as a result of tafsir of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, almost all of which are intimately related to theological and doctrinal issues. Secondly, over a third of the Qur’an deals with issues related to *uṣūl al-dīn*, and Ḥaydarī quotes Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s view that all the secondary laws and ethical issues dealt with in the Qur’an revert back to the three main foundational principles of Islam, and that two of these, prophecy and resurrection, ultimately lead back to the supreme doctrine of *tawḥīd*.³⁷

In the dialogue Ḥaydarī focuses particularly on the controversial question of the

³⁶ Kassār, *al-Manhaj al-‘Aqā’idī*, 70; Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī, “Durūs fi Sharḥ Tajrīd al-I’tiqād: al-Tawḥīd” lecture 108, <<http://www.alhaidery.net>>.

³⁷ Kassār, *al-Manhaj al-‘Aqā’idī*, 22-23.

role of philosophy in *al-Mizān*. He defends Ṭabāṭabā'ī against the accusation that his tafsir was “philosophical” in the same way as Mullā Ṣadrā's tafsir. Whereas Ṣadr al-Dīn takes the Qur'anic verses as proofs (*dalīl*) for philosophical discussions he has already researched in the *Asfār* and makes philosophy the foundation (*mabnā*) and starting point of tafsir, Ṭabāṭabā'ī scrupulously separates purely philosophical discussions from the main body of *al-Mizān*. Ḥaydarī gives the example of two possible exegetical approaches to the verse “and *you* see the mountains, which *you* suppose to be stationary, while they drift like passing clouds-the handiwork of Allah who has made everything faultless...”³⁸ One approach, the “the adaptive method” (*manhaj taṭbīqī*), is to apply the Sadrian principle of trans-substantial motion to the verse and conclude that the movement of the mountains referred to is a proof for that philosophical principle. This would be an example of “philosophical tafsir” where the goal is to explain *ḥarakat jawharīyah* as much as the *zāhir al-āyah*. The other way is “we come to the Qur'an and seek the help of other verses to clarify the intended meaning [of the verse under discussion] and to define its meaning so that we take the intellect and transmitted texts as guides to fathom the topic from the Qur'an itself.” This path is the exegetical method (*manhaj tafsīrī*) exemplified in *al-Mizān*.³⁹

Like other students of Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ḥaydarī compares the role of intellect to a lamp illuminating the ambiguities of the revealed religious texts, quoting part of a hadith from Imam Ali that “verily the likeness of the intellect in the heart is the likeness of a lamp in the middle of the house.”⁴⁰ Therefore, it is more appropriate to say that Ṭabāṭabā'ī made use of a rational methodology (*manhaj 'aqlī*) in those Qur'anic topics which are rationally

³⁸ Q 27:88.

³⁹ Kassār, *al-Manhaj al-Aqā'idī*, 43-4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 38.

based, with the difference that the apparent meanings of the Qur'an remain the focus of discussion (*al-miḥwar huwa-l-Qur'ān*). As he puts it: "The rational principles of philosophy and the spiritual unveilings of the mystics are "preliminaries" (*muqaddimāt*) for understanding the Noble Qur'an." In typical *ḥawzah* style Ḥaydarī cites a logical proof for this, namely, while the meanings of the Qur'an are unlimited, the tools of the intellect and the heart are limited, so "it is natural that the restricted should be at the service of the unrestricted, and the limited serve the unlimited, because Allah has disclosed (*tajallā*) Himself in His book--'so He has disclosed Himself to them in His book'-as Imam Ali, peace be upon him, has described the Qur'an."⁴¹

One of the other contentious hermeneutical questions discussed in the dialogue is the place of *riwāyāt*. Ḥaydarī takes Ṭabāṭabā'ī's position that they are a means not an end; they are tools which verify and reaffirm the conclusions drawn from tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. "Sayyid Ṭabāṭabā'ī's tafsir is neither philosophical, nor theological, nor scientific, nor mystical, nor academic. Rather it is an explanation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, making use in its methodology of both the intellect and the narrated texts as two lamps- because he also deals with narrated texts [as well as intellect] as a guiding lamp (*misbāḥ murshid*)."⁴² In this way the narrated texts play the same role as the intellect in "lighting the path to understanding the teachings of the Qur'an", but this role does not pertain to one or two *riwāyāt*, rather to "the general trend (*ittijāh 'āmm*) which predominates in the *riwāyāt*". This is Ṭabāṭabā'ī's "definite Sunnah."

Ḥaydarī closes the dialogue by explaining that when he began teaching *al-Mizān* his goal was to give *ḥawzah* students keys to understanding Ṭabāṭabā'ī's tafsir. These

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 27.

⁴² *Ibid*, 40.

keys are none other than those core theological and philosophical concepts and principles found in the first five volumes. If someone, well-trained in the relevant rational and narrative fields, mastered those concepts, then he would possess keys for all the remaining volumes. Without such keys *al-Mizān* remains a closed book, both in terms of its methodology and intellectual concepts. As an example of one of these key concepts Ḥaydarī mentions intercession (*shafā'ah*), a topic which Ṭabāṭabā'ī discusses at length in *al-Mizān*.⁴³ Other examples that might fall in this category are miracles and the divine treasures. In Ḥaydarī's view, a serious researcher of *al-Mizān* must be familiar with Ṭabāṭabā'ī's entire philosophical and mystical heritage (*turāth*), especially fundamental Sadrian principles which he relied on in all his works. Perhaps the most fundamental key is understanding that the Qur'an and philosophical realities are existential, not material, and that all of them are gradated and derive from the supreme reality of *tawḥīd*.⁴⁴

Scholarly Renewal and the Contemporary *Ḥawzah*

Both Jawādī Āmulī and Kamāl Ḥaydarī are two prime examples of the continuation of what might tentatively be called the Ṭabāṭabā'ī school in the contemporary *ḥawzah*.⁴⁵ The most characteristic aspect of this approach is the active employment of “the inseparability of the Qur'an, *burhān* and *'irfān*” to illuminate a wide array of intellectual and ethical Islamic issues in a spirit of tempered renewal, neither

⁴³ M 1:154-175. Ḥaydarī has a book on the topic drawing extensively from *al-Mizān*. Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī, *al-Shafā'ah: Buḥūth fī Ḥaqīqatiha wa Aqsāmiha wa Mu'ṭiyātiha*. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Tārikh al-'Arabī, 1425/2004).

⁴⁴ At the end of writing this dissertation, the present writer has learned that Ḥaydarī's latest work concerns *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa-l-Ta'wīl* from Ṭabāṭabā'ī's point of view.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that all these students have been teaching in the *ḥawzah* of Qum. Given that the political situation in Iraq has been unstable for three decades, it is not surprising that there has been a limited amount of scholarly activity in the *ḥawzah* of Najaf.

blindly holding onto past scholars' work for the sake of tradition nor prematurely abandoning tradition for the sake of modernism. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's most important legacy in *al-Mizān* was leading the way in this tempered renewal, particularly in the field of Qur'anic hermeneutics. With very rare exceptions, before *al-Mizān* there was not even an articulate expression of what should a proper tafsir look like, let alone calls for revival and renewal in that field. This renewal can only take place through valid, knowledge-based ijtiḥād, through reflection on the apparent meanings of all the Qur'anic verses, making use of sound intellect and reliable transmitted texts as guides. The goal of this ijtiḥād is not only to let the Qur'an speak for itself regarding its general teachings, but also to open the way for ijtiḥād in all the Islamic sciences which derive from the Qur'an. The above-mentioned students of Ṭabāṭabā'ī have led the way in pursuing ijtiḥād in theology, mysticism, and philosophy, so that mostly because of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's influence the contemporary *ḥawzah* is undergoing an intellectual revival. Just as it has been aptly said that it will take "centuries" for *al-Mizān* to be truly appreciated, perhaps it will take a comparable amount of time to determine whether this revival will endure.

Conclusion

Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī was an exceptional Shī'ī philosopher and exegete whose distinctive hermeneutics is embodied in the twenty volume masterpiece, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. While Ṭabāṭabā'ī was far from the first scholar to propose the methodology of tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, the preceding chapters have illustrated what sets apart his views and practice from those of previous exegetes. In sum, the classical *mufasssīrīn* insufficiently expounded tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an in theory, and pursued other paths in practice. By far the most common of these paths was excessive reliance on *riwāyāt*, although a few other methods existed. The most important of these alternative approaches, philosophy and mysticism, were the target of intense criticism as representations of condemned exegesis according to personal opinion, *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*.

Despite Ṭabāṭabā'ī's advocacy of both philosophy and mysticism as essential elements of religion, he, too, had strong reservations about their place in exegesis. True tafsir looks first and foremost at the Qur'an, not of non-Qur'anic texts like philosophy, mysticism, or even hadith. Although tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an necessitates that the interpretation of the apparent meanings of the Qur'anic verses always takes priority, this does not imply that other fields have no place in tafsir; rather their role is instrumental. Authentic hadith acts a guide for the exegete to gain the right "training and the acquired taste"¹ necessary to perform exegesis. True philosophy, encapsulated in sound rational proofs, is an inner lamp enlightening ambiguous texts, most importantly

¹ M 3:101.

the *āyāt mutashābihāt*. Mysticism, direct knowledge of God and the self, is the natural end of divine philosophy and a prerequisite for maintaining a proper perspective on the Qur'anic realities.

This dissertation has attempted to convey the above points in seven chapters. Chapter One covered Ṭabāṭabā'ī's background and importance in revitalizing the *ḥawzah* in fields outside of *fiqh*. Chapter Two presented the thrust of the 'Allāmah's methodology, particularly his innovative take on *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*. Chapters Three, Four and Five examined the hermeneutics of *al-Mizān* from the point of view of the specific exegetical questions of hadith, philosophy and mysticism, respectively. The distinct approach of the preeminent verses, the *āyāt al-ghurar*, which serve as keys opening the *tawḥīd*-based worldview of the Qur'an, was the topic of Chapter Six. Finally, the impact of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's hermeneutical *ijtihād* on the contemporary *ḥawzah* was surveyed in Chapter Seven. While this analysis of *al-Mizān* and the hermeneutics of *tafsīr* of the Qur'an by the Qur'an does not claim to be exhaustive, it is hoped that new paths of inquiry into the significance of the work have been presented. This applies not only to *tafsīr*, but to the current intellectual milieu of the *ḥawzah* as well.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*. Edited by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā al-Qabbānī. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm, 1405/1985.

Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn. 4 vols. Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī, 1387/1967.

al-Ḥaydarī, Kamāl. *Sharḥ Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah*. Compiled by Khalīl Rizq. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 1425/2004.

Ibn 'Arabī [attributed]. *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī*. Edited by Samīr Muṣṭafā Rabāb. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1422/2001.

Ibn Taymīyah, 'Abd al-Ḥalīm. *Muqaddimat fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. Cairo: al-Maṭba'at al-Salafīyah, 1380.

An Introduction to the Principles of Tafseer. Translated by Muhammad 'Abul Haq Ansari. Birthingam, U.K.: al-Hidaayah Publishing, 1993.

Jawādī Āmulī, 'Abd Allāh. *Tafsīr-i Insān bi Insān: Naẓariyat-i Jadīd pīrāmūn-i Ma'rifat Shināsī-yi Insān*. Qum: Isrā', 1384

Tasnīm: Tafsīr-i Qur'ān-i Karīm. Qum: Isrā', 1378 SH.

Tafsīr-i Maḍū'ī Qur'ān-i Karīm: Qur'ān dar Qur'ān. Qum: Isrā', 1378 SH.

Pīrāmūn-i Waḥy wa Rahbarī. Qum: al-Zahrā', 1368 SH.

al-Kāshānī, al-Fayḍ (Muḥammad ibn Muḥsin). *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi*. 5 vols. Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1399/1979.

al-Kulaynī, Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb. *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*. Edited by Muḥammad Ja'far Shams al-Dīn. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf, 1419/1998.

Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir. *Bihār al-Anwār al-Jāmi‘ah li-Durar al-Akhhbār al-A‘immat al-Athār*. 110 vols. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub, 1956-1978.

al-Qurṭubī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *al-Jāmi‘ li-l-Aḥkam al-Qur’ān*. 20 vols. Edited by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1420/1999.

al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Mafātīh al-Ghayb (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)*. 32 vols. [Tehran?]: n.p, n.d.

Riḍā, Rashīd. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm (al-Shahīr bi-Tafsīr al-Manār)*. 12 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, n.d.

al-Sabzawārī, ‘Abd al-A‘la. *Mawāhib al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*. 4 vols. Beirut: Mu’assasat Ahl al-Bayt, 1409/1988.

al-Ṣādiqī, Muḥammad. *al-Furqān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi-l-Qur’ān wa-l-Sunnah*. 4 vols [?]. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-A‘lamī, 1397/1977.

al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Bāqir. *al-Madrasat al-Qur’āniyah: al-Sunan al-Tā’rīkhīyah fi-l-Qur’ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Ta‘āruf, 1409/1989.

Durūs fī ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl. 2 vols. Qum: Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmīyah, 1418.

Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence according to Shi‘i Law. Translated by Arif Abdul Hussain, Revised by Hamid Algar. London: ICAS Press, 2003.

Shirāzī, Ṣadr al-Dīn (Ṣadr al-Muta‘allihīn). *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta‘ālīyah fi-l-Asfār al-‘Aqliyah al-Arba‘a*. 4 vols [?]. n.p, Dār al-Ma‘ārif al-Islāmīyah, n.d.

Mafātīh al-Ghayb. Edited by Fātin Muḥammad Khalīl al-Labbūn. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Tā’rīkh al-‘Arabī, 1423/2003.

Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm. Edited by Muḥammad Khawājī. 7 vols. Qum: Intirshārāt-i Bīdār, 1379 SH.

Majmū'a-yi Rasā'il-i Falsafī-yi Şadr al-Muta'allihīn. Edited by Hāmid Nāji Işfahānī.
Tehran: Hikmat, 1375 SH.

al-Suyūṭī, 'Abd al-Rahmān. *al-Itqān fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān.* 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub
al-'Ilmīyah, 1415/1995.

al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān.* 31 vols.
Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Maymanīyah, 1321.

The Commentary on the Qur'ān: Volume One. Translated by J. Cooper. Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1987.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Tafsīr al-Bayān fi-l-Muwāfaqah bayn al-Ḥadīth wa-
l-Qur'ān.* Edited by Aşghar Irādātī. 6 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf, 1327/2006.
The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics (Bidāyat al-Hikmah). Translated by 'Alī Qūlī
Qarā'ī. London: ICAS Press, 2003.

al-Rasā'il al-Tawḥīdīyah. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Nu'mān, 1419/1999.

al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān. 22 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Ilamī, 1417/1997.

al-Mizān: An Exegesis of the Qur'ān. Translated by Saeed Akhtar Rizvi. 12 vols.
Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1981-2003.

Usus al-Falsafah wa-l-Madhhab al-Wāq'ī. Translated by Muḥammad 'Abd al-
Mun'im al-Khānqānī. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf, 1408/1988.

Barrasīhā-yi Islāmī. Edited by Sayyid Hādī Khusrawshāhī. Qum: Dār al-Tabligh-i
Islāmī, 1396.

Qur'ān dar Islām. Mashhad: Intishārāt-i Ṭulū', n.d.

The Qur'an in Islam: Its Impact and Influence on the Life of Muslims. Translated by
Assadullah ad-Dhaakir Yate. Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2003.

'Alī wa-l-Falsafat al-Ilāhīyah. n.p, al-Dār al-Islāmīyah, n.d.

Tihirānī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī. "Lubb al-Albāb dar Sayr-o-Sulūk-i ūlī-l-Albāb,"
Yadnāma-yi Ūstād-i Shahīd Murtaḍa Muṭahharī. Edited by 'Abd al-Karīm Surūsh.

Tehran, 1360 SH/1981, 193-255.

Kernel of the Kernel: Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of the Intellect (Risāla-yi Lubb al-Lubāb [sic] dar Sayr wa Sulūk-I Ulu' l Albāb).

Translated by Mohammad H. Faghfoory. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.

al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan. *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Edited by Aḥmad Ḥabīb Quṣayr al-Āmilī. 10 vols. Najaf: al-Maṭba'at al-Īlmīyah, 1376/1957.

al-Zarkashī. Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh. *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Edited by Muḥammad Abū-l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. 4 vols. n.p, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyah, 1376/1957.

Secondary Literature

Algar, Hamid. "Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī: Philosopher, Exegete, Gnostic." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17 (2006): 326-51.

al-Faḍlī, 'Abd al-Ḥādī. *Introduction to Ḥadīth*. Translated by Nazmina Virjee. London: ICAS Press, 2002.

'Āṣī, Ḥasan. *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī wa-l-Lughat al-Ṣūfiyah fī Falsafat Ibn Sīna*. Beirut: al-Mu'assasat al-Jāmi'iyyah li-l Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1403/1983.

Ayoub, Mahmoud M. *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*. 2 vols. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1984-1992.

al-Awsī, 'Alī. *al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī wa Manhajuhu fī Tafsīrihi al-Mizān*. Tehran, 1405, 1985

Bar-Asher, Meir M. *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999.

Bīd-i Hindī, Nāṣir Bāqirī. “Mufasssīr wa Hakīm-i Ilāhī Ḥaḍrat-i Āyat Allāh Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī.” *Nūr-i ‘Ilm* 3 (1989/1368 SH): 44-87.

al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *al-Tafsīr wa-l-Mufasssīrūn*. 2 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1381.

al-Gharawī, Muḥammad. *Ma‘a ‘Ulamā’ al-Najaf al-Ashraf*. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Thaqalayn, 1999.

al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *al-Mustaṣfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Arqam ibn Abī-l-Arqam, n.d.

Ḥasanzādah, Ṣādiq. *Uswat al-‘Urafā’*. Qum: Maktabat Āl ‘Alī, 1424.

Ḥasanzādah Āmulī, Ḥasan. “Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī dar Manẓara-yi ‘Irfān-i Nazarī wa ‘Amalī.” *Kayhān-i Andisha* 26 (1368 SH): 2-12.

“Matn-i Muṣāḥaba-yi Ustād ‘Allāmah Ḥasan Ḥasanzadah Āmulī dar Mawrid-i ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī.” n.p. n.d.

Ibn Manẓur, Muḥammad. *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Edited by ‘Alī Shīrī. 19 vols. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1408/1988.

Jansen, Johannes J.G. *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974.

Kassār, Jawād ‘Alī. *al-Manhaj al-‘Aqā’idī fi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān: Ḥiwār ma‘a al-Sayyid Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī*. n.p, Dār Farāqid, 1423.

- Karīmān, Husayn. *Ṭabarsī va Majma‘ al-Bayān*. 2 vols. Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Danishgāh-i Tihrān, 1341 SH.
- Kirmānī, Qanbar ‘Alī. *Kitābshināsī-yi ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā‘ī*. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Danishgāh-yi ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, 1383 SH.
- Lagarde, Michel. *Index du Grande commentaire de Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1996.
- Luqmānī, Aḥmad. *‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā‘ī: Mizān-i Ma‘rifat*. Tehran: Markāz-i Chāp va Nashr-i Bayn al-Milal, 1380 SH.
Eternal Manifestation: 80 Stories from the Life of ‘Allama Tabataba‘i (ra).
Translated by S.K. Yusuf Ali. <<http://al-islam.org/eternalmanifestations/>>.
- McAulifee, Jane Dammen. *Qur’ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Muṭahharī, Murtaḍā. *Fundamentals of Islamic Thought: God, Man and the Universe*. Translated by R. Campbell. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1985.
- al-Muẓaffar, Muḥammad Riḍā. *al-Mantiq*. Tehran: Ilhām, 1377 SH.
- Nasr, Seyyd Hossein. “The Qur’anic Commentaries of Mullā Ṣadrā.” In *Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshitiko Izutsu*. Edited by Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī, et al. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999.
- al-Rahim, Ahmed H. “The Twelver-Šī‘ī Reception of Avicenna in the Mongol Period.” In *Before and After Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group*. Edited by David C. Reisman, with the assistance of Ahmed H. al-Rahim. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), 219-31.

- Rukhshād, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Dar Maḥḍar-i 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī*. Qum: Intishārāt-i Nawahāndī, 1380 SH.
- Rizvi, Sajjad. "Mysticism and Philosophy: Ibn 'Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā." In *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*. Edited by Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Sands, Kristin Zahra. *Ṣūfī Commentaries of the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Sayyid 'Alawī, Sayyid Ibrāhīm. "Mitud-i Naqd wa Taḥqīq-i Ḥadīth az Naẓar-i 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī." *Kayhān-i Andisha*: 26: 21-39.
- Tawdīh al-Masā'il-i Marāji'*. Compiled by Banī Hāshimī Khumaynī, Iḥsān Uṣūlī, *et al.* 2 vols. Daftar Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1378 SH.
- Tihrānī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī. *Mihr-i Tābān: Yādnāma va Musāhibāt-i Tilmīz va 'Alāma-yi 'Ālim Rabbānī 'Allāmah-i Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī Tabrīzī*. Tehran: Mu'assasa-yi Intishārāt-i Bāqir al-'Ulūm, n.d.
- al-Shams al-Sāṭ'iah*. Translated by al-Sayyid 'Abbās Nūr al-Dīn and 'Abd al-Raḥīm Mubārak. Beirut: Dār al-Muḥajjat al-Bayḍā', 1418.