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An introduction to the great book of Tafsir Al-Mizan and a brief biography of its author, Allama Tabataba'i

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An Introduction To Al-Mizan

By Abu al-Qasim Razzaq

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Among the many valuable works of the great exegete 'Allamah Tabataba'i, al-Mizan occupies a distinguished position due to its unique qualities, not only among his own books but also among all the Islamic books written so far on religion, science, philosophy and especially among all the old and new exegeses of the Qur'an, written by both the Sunnis and the Shi'ah. This article, aimed at giving an account of its contents, cannot provide a detailed account of its salient features but can help the reader to acquaint themselves with the glimpses of its elegance.

I find myself unworthy of performing this great task as great personages like the great thinker, scholar of the Qur'an, and an exegete himself, Ayatullah Mutahhari has stated about *al-Mizan* that it is the greatest exegesis of the Qur'an written since the advent of Islam, and that it will take another sixty or even one hundred years for our people to realize the greatness of *al-Mizan* of 'Allamah Tabataba'i. Other scholars, experts and men of insight have made similar remarks regarding this book.

Any attempt at presenting the profound issues of *al-Mizan*, even in a cursory way in a brief article like this is like an attempt to contain the great Atlantic in a small pot. But anyhow, I wish to collect some drops from this vast ocean of Islamic learning according to my limited capacities in order to quench my intense thirst. I ask for help from the gentle soul of the pious writer of this immortal book to guide me in performing this job in a good manner.

Brief Biography of Allamah Tabataba'i

Al- 'Allamah al-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Tabataba'i (1281-1360/1901-1980) is one of the greatest and the most original thinkers of the contemporary Muslim world. He was a prolific writer and an inspiring teacher, who devoted whole of his life to Islamic studies. His interests were varied and the scope of his learning was vast. His books number about forty-four, three of which are collections of his articles on various aspects of Islam and the Quran. His major contributions are in the fields of tafsir, philosophy and history of Shi'ah faith.

In philosophy the most important of his works is *Usul-e falsafah wa rawish-e riyalism* (The principles of philosophy and the method of realism), which has been published in five volumes with the explanatory notes and commentary of Martyr Murtada Mutahhari. It deals with the Islamic outlook of the world, which is not only opposed to idealism that negates the reality of the corporeal world, but is also opposed to the materialistic conception of the world, which reduces all reality to ambiguous materialistic myths and fabrications. The point is established that while the Islamic world-outlook is realistic, both the idealistic and materialistic outlooks are unrealistic. His other major philosophical work is a voluminous commentary of al-'Asfar al-'Arba'ah, the magnum opus of Mulla Sadra, the last of the great Muslim thinkers of the medieval age.

Besides these, he wrote extensively on philosophical issues. His humanist approach is underlined by his three books on man before this world, in this world and after this world. His philosophy is overloaded with sociological treatment of human problems. His two other works, *Bidayat al-Hikmah* and *Nihayat al-Hikmah*, are considered among works of a high order in Muslim philosophy. He wrote several treatises on the doctrines and history of the Shi'ah. One of these books comprises his clarifications and expositions about Shi'ah faith in reply to the questions posed by the famous French orientalist Henry Corbin. Another of his books on this topic *Shi'ah dar Islam* was translated into English by Sayyid Husayn Nasr under the title *The Shi'ite Islam*.

These books serve as a good means of removing popular misconceptions about the Shi'ah and can

pave the way for a better inter-sectarian understanding among Muslim schools. If a single work is to be named as his masterpiece, al-Mizan can be mentioned without hesitation, which is the outcome of the 'Allamah's lifelong labour in the sphere of Quranic studies. His method, style and approach are uniquely different from those of all other interpreters of the Quran.

The present article is an introduction to this unique and brilliantly original tafsir. Though very sketchy, this article is selected for translation into English from among numerous articles written on his works and life, for it exclusively deals with the contents of al Mizan. Recently a Persian translation of al-Mizan was published by the Intisharat-e Amir Kabir in twenty volumes corresponding with the twenty-volume set of the original Arabic text of the tafsir. Six volumes of al-Mizan have so far appeared in English, translated by Mawlana Sa'id Akhtar Ridwi, and it is hoped that the other volumes would be rendered into English by the same translator in the near future. Another aspect of 'Allamah Tabataba'i's personality is his unprecedented success as a great teacher.

Among his pupils we find a group of such luminaries and thinkers of eminence in their own right as Martyr Murtada Mutahhari, Martyr Bihishti, Hasan Hasanzadeh Amuli and Husayn Nasr. The 'Allamah was also a good poet. He composed poetry mainly in Persian, but occasionally in Arabic also. Abu al-Qasim Razzaqi, the author of this article, was one of the 46 martyred in the downing of a civilian aircraft by the jets of the criminal Ba'thist regime in Iranian territory near the city of Ahvaz on February 20, 1986.

The History Of Al-Mizan

Before giving an account of its salient features and contents we shall record a short history of *al-Mizan*. 'Allamah Tabataba'i, who came to the *Hawzah* of Qum in 1325 H., wrote and lectured extensively on different branches of Islamic sciences. Commentary and exegesis of the Qur'an was one of the topics of his discussions, which he held with the scholars and students of the *Hawzeh-ye 'Ilmiyyah* of Qum. About the motive of writing al-Mizan, 'Allamah Tabataba'i himself states that when he came to Qum from Tabriz he tried to evaluate the requirements of the Islamic society as well as the conditions prevailing in the *Hawzeh-ye 'Ilmiyyah* of Qum, and after due consideration of the matter he came to the conclusion that the school was badly in need of a commentary of the Qur'an for a better understanding and more effective instruction of the sublime meanings of the purest of all Islamic texts and the highest of all Divine gifts.

On the other hand, since materialistic notions were gaining prevalence, there was a great need for a rational and philosophical discourse to enable the *Hawzah* to rise to the occasion for elaborating the intellectual and doctrinal principles of Islam with the help of rational arguments in order to defend the Islamic position. He thus considered it his duty to make efforts in fulfilling these two urgent needs with the help of God, the Most High.

The lectures on exegesis of the Qur'an were planned according to this scheme. Perhaps 'Allamah Tabataba'i might have delivered lectures on the entire Qur'an for his students for several times, and in

the meanwhile he might have written a commentary. During these sessions of well thought out discourses he might have rendered these lectures into his terse and eloquent prose, which was later printed in a number of volumes.

The first edition of *al-Mizan* in Arabic was printed in Iran and then it was reprinted in Beirut. Till now more than three editions have been printed in Iran and in Beirut in large numbers, and very few of the public and private libraries will be found without a complete set of it. All other libraries, too, at least have some of the volumes of this commentary on their shelves.

The original text of *al-Mizan* is written in Arabic, consisting of twenty volumes, and each volume has about four hundred pages of big size. It was intended that all those interested in reading the exegesis of the Qur'an may be properly benefited from this treasure of the Qur'anic teachings. Some of the pupils of 'Allamah Tabataba'i have translated this book into Persian under his able direction and supervision, and each one of the Arabic volumes was translated in two volumes of the Persian, making a total number of forty. The share of this responsibility was shouldered by Aqa Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Musawi Hamadani.

With the view that the entire Persian translation of *al-Mizan* should not appear in different styles, which would have affected the book's readability, 'Allamah Tabataba'i gave him the beginning volumes of *al-Mizan* also for retranslation. We hope that this fine exegesis of the Divine words of the Qur'an will be translated into other living languages of the world also, and will be made accessible to all those who want to quench their thirst for divine knowledge and who are eager to be familiar with the life-giving principles of Islam.

It would be in the fitness of things that this exegesis is placed in the hands of the committed individuals and scholars who are familiar with the language of the Qur'an also. It will be a great service if the universal message of the Qur'an is projected in such a manner that humanity is delivered from the unholy clutches of pagan cultures. The monotheistic culture of the Qur'an alone is capable of emancipating human beings from all kinds of servitudes and indignities.

The Salient Features Of Al-Mizan

Al-Mizan has diverse facets: scientific, technical, aesthetic, philosophical, literary, historical, spiritual, sociological and traditional (dealing with hadith). But three of these aspects are more conspicuous while others are rather subordinated to them.

1. Interpretation Of The Qur'an By The Qur'an

In his commentary on the Qur'an, 'Allamah Tabataba'i shows his great originality in pointing out, firstly, the close, interrelatedness of the verses of the Qur'an with one another, and then he proves that due to this inherent coordination the Qur'anic verses explain and interpret one another. In other words, 'Allamah

Tabataba'i brought to light the fact that:

الْقُرْآنُ يَفْسِّرُ بَعْضُهُ بَعْضًا

Some parts of the Qur'an interpret some other parts.

For understanding of the verses and their interpretation, we should seek help from the Qur'an itself. He has discussed the problem of the interpretation of the Qur'an in his book *Qur'an dar Islam* ('The [place of the] Qur'an in Islam'). After a lucid exposition in this regard, 'Allamah Tabataba'i says that a true exegesis of the Qur'an is possible only through profound contemplation of the verses and reference for guidance to all the other related Qur'anic verses. In other words, any one of the three following methods is open to us for a correct exposition of the verses.

1. Exposition of any of the verses in isolation from other verses undertaken with the help of scientific and non-scientific premises that are within our reach.
2. Exposition of a verse with the aid and application of a tradition handed down to us by one of the Ma'sumin ('a), narrated in the context of the verse under consideration.
3. Exposition of the verse by reflecting upon the wordings and meanings of the verses with the help of a group of relevant verses and in addition to this, consulting the traditions whenever necessary.

Then he adds that the third method is the same which was deduced in the previous chapter (i.e, of *The Place of the Qur'an in Islam*). This is the same method which was employed by the Prophet (S) and the Imams ('a), as we learn from their teachings. The Prophet (S) said:

وَإِنَّمَا نَزَلَ لِیُصَدِّقَ بَعْضُهُ بَعْضًا

Some of the verses were revealed to verify some other verses.

Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ('a) said:

يَنْطِقُ بَعْضُهُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيَشْهَدُ بَعْضُهُ عَلَى بَعْضٍ

Some of the verses speak about some other verses and some of them testify some others.

At the end, the 'Allamah reminds us of an important point; that is, according to this method the Qur'an is explained by the Qur'an, not on the basis of personal opinions of an interpreter, a method that was disapproved by a famous tradition of the Prophet (S). Afterwards 'Allamah Tabataba'i explains and compares these three methods of exposition in detail, and holds that on the basis of Qur'anic arguments

and proofs from tradition the third method is the best for understanding the Qur'an. In the concluding part of this discussion, he presents a specimen of the exposition of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, which we cannot cite here for the sake of brevity.

This speciality of *al-Mizan* can be considered as a significant step taken in the direction of better understanding of the miraculous qualities of the Qur'an regarding the coherence and interrelatedness of its verses.

2. The Sociological Aspect

More or less all the commentaries of the Qur'an have paid attention to its sociological facets and have discussed the relevant issues, yet *al-Mizan* is incomparable with other commentaries in this regard. The sociological discussions presented in *al-Mizan* are both qualitatively and quantitatively of a far superior standard.

With his multidimensional approach and broad outlook in the sphere of social problems, 'Allamah Tabataba'i has been successful in projecting these issues in the light of the Qur'anic verses. He has thrown a new light on certain sociological problems from the Qur'anic point of view which were overlooked till now, and has opened up new vistas for the inspired readers who are ever eager to discover and explore some new dimensions from among the various marvellous dimensions of the Holy Qur'an.

3. The Philosophical Aspect

'Allamah Tabataba'i, being a clear-sighted philosopher of rare excellence and originality, has performed a great service to the science of *tafsir* by elaborating the Qur'anic metaphysics which gives us a correct and valuable insight into the realities of life in the true sense of metaphysics. He has refuted all baseless misconceptions which are attributed to the Qur'an. In his view Muslim metaphysics has its roots in notions concerning God, man and the universe. Similarly, 'Allamah Tabataba'i also points out that the main factor responsible for the general distrust regarding metaphysics issues from the lack of proper understanding and correct information about it.

In his valuable books like the *Usul-e falsafah wa rawish-e riyalism* (The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism'), the commentary on al-'Asfar of Mulla Sadra, *Bidayat al-hikmah*, and *Nihayat al-hikmah*, he has explained and clarified all such doubts concerning metaphysics. In *al-Mizan*, he has discussed these philosophical matters in the light of the Qur'anic verses and inferred certain philosophical conceptions from them, which is something unprecedented in the history of exegesis of the Qur'an.

In the course of his exposition of the Qur'anic verses and their relevance to metaphysical notions he has proved the validity of the Qur'anic outlook and the absurdity and baselessness of the philosophy of materialism. This part of his exegesis is also quite original and new in the field of philosophical studies.

These discussions have a rare profundity, accuracy and refinement that will continue to fascinate the scholars in future.

I have confined my brief comments to the three most salient features of *al-Mizan*, while the other dimensions, which in my view are subordinated to these three, will be discussed later.

A Brief Survey Of The Contents Of Al-Mizan

For a thorough understanding of this valuable, great and cyclopaedic book about Islamic learning, it is necessary to have a bird's eye view of the whole book in order to know the diversity of its issues. I confess again my own limitations of understanding, which may have rendered my comprehension of the profound meanings and the vast span of the history of ideas covered by *al-Mizan* defective and inadequate. Each one of the twenty volumes of *al-Mizan* we intend to discuss separately.

The First Volume

‘Allamah Tabataba’i has written a preface to the book consisting of approximately eleven pages, in which he has suggested some important points:

1. The meaning of the science of exegesis and reference to its historical development since the era of revelation of the Qur’an to this day.
2. An account of various exegeses of the Qur’an written by different Muslim scholars with reference to the causes of difference among them. He believes that every exegete of the Qur’an has viewed the Qur’an from his own intellectual point of view and presented his interpretation in accordance with it. ‘Allamah Tabataba’i has also pointed out their individual weaknesses and has written a compendious criticism of them.
3. In the end he has referred to the style of his own exegesis, which he considers to be based on a new approach, that is, interpreting the Qur’an by the Qur’an itself. Then he gives a snapshot view of the various aspects of his method and approach employed in the exegesis, and concludes the preface.

He begins the exposition of the first *surah*, *Fatihah al-kitab*, with a brief commentary on:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

He discusses several Qur'anic, philosophical and psychological issues in the light of this *surah*. At first, he unfolds the meaning of *al-hamd* (praise) in the context of God, the Most Holy, and the word *al-sirat* – the path to *hidayah*. The other discussion is about the meaning and use of the terms *jary* [*lit.* intending something; a term repeatedly occurring in the sayings of the Imams ('a)] and *intibaq* [the application of the Qur'anic verses to specific situations by the Imams ('a)] in the Qur'an, which is based on the traditions. From page 43 to the end of this volume, which contains 414 pages, he covers 182 verses of the second *surah*, *al-Baqarah*.

He has expounded some of the profoundest themes of the Qur'an in the light of these verses in a comprehensive and lucid way in the following order:

1. In the beginning there are two philosophical discussions about the super sensible perception and the necessity of sciences. Then are discussed the causes of kufr (infidelity), the nature of miracles, and the miraculous qualities of the Qur'an. In this context various aspects of the Qur'an have been discussed in a detailed and logical way. This discussion begins from page 58 and continues till page 86 of this volume.
2. After this some other important issues are taken up, such as the meaning of prophetic mission, metaphorical meaning of the concretization of certain deeds, determinism (*jabr*) and delegated freedom (*tafwid*), *amr bayna al-'amrayn*, (the intermediate stage between two extreme positions), the meanings of the acts of making (*ja'l*) and creation (*khalq*), instruction of the Names to Adam ('a), and the creation of heaven for him.
3. The most important of the discussions of this book is the one about the problem of intercession (*shafa'ah*). It can be said with certainty about this discussion that such a logical and detailed analysis of the issue was never attempted in any of the Islamic books on this subject. 'Allamah Tabataba'i has divided the issue of intercession into six subtitles and has made it a subject of extensive study. In the end of this discussion, he has dealt with the psychological, philosophical and sociological aspects of intercession.
4. The other discussions of this volume include the Sabaeans; the revival of the dead; metamorphosis; refutation of the doctrine of Sonship of Christ; the meaning of the Imamate spiritual leadership its proofs, and other important issues related to it ; magic and

the obsolete occult sciences; the laying of the foundation of the Holy Ka' bah and the legislation concerning the *Qiblah* ; the meaning and stages of *islam* and the *iman* ; meaning of *dhikr* (remembrance of God); the world of *Barzakh* (intermediary stage between death and Resurrection); detachment of the self ; morality; dependence of man-made things upon God Almighty; the meaning of love and its relations to God; perpetuity and eternity of punishment; *taqlid* (spiritual following or imitation in religious matters) and its meaning; the meaning of *ibraz* (producing or bringing out certain proofs); and lastly the issue of *qisas* (the law of retaliation) with reference to the objections raised against the laws of *qisas* and their refutation.

The Second Volume

It begins with the exposition of the 183rd verse of the *Surat al Baqarah* (the Cow), and the exposition of this *surah* continues till the end of this volume, which has 448 pages. The other discussions of this volume are concerning the following subjects:

The revelation of the Qur'an in the month of Ramadan and on the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*) with special emphasis on its stage by stage revelation; meaning of *du'a*, supplication; private ownership as one of the permanent social institutions; jihad, as enjoined by the Qur'an; the social necessity of defence; *mut'ah* (temporary marriage); *haji*, generality of its laws; the problem of *raj'ah* (resurrection) and the refutation of the doubts expressed by some people against it.

There is a comprehensive discussion about the reality of human existence, and the history of mankind, the origin of human existence and general human characteristics, emergence of differences among human beings, human life in the Hereafter and other such issues have been fully investigated. 'Allamah Tabataba'i has expressed his scholarly opinion regarding these issues and analysed them with remarkable insight. There is another significant discussion regarding the problem of prophethood, which has been discussed from various angles, such as the Qur'anic, philosophical and social. He has analysed in detail the purport of the verse:

وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ قِمْتُ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

“...And whoso becomes a renegade and dies in his disbelief: such are they whose works have fallen both in the world and Hereafter” (2:217).

With reference to this verse he has dealt with the problem of the futility of actions. In this context he has discussed the Qur'anic injunctions concerning the acts and other related problems at a high academic level and estimated them carefully. This discussion covers almost 54 pages from page 118 up to 172.

Other topics of the discussion that have Qur'anic, scientific, sociological and philosophical implications are as follows:

The meaning of the 'heart' (*qalb*) in the Qur'an ; the use of words like *'ilm* (knowledge) and *idrak* (perception, cognition) in the Qur'an; the position and rights of women in Islam and other civilizations with regard to marriage, and divorce; the meaning of *sakinah* (tranquillity of mind); the struggle for existence and natural selection; the meaning of *salam*; the meaning of existence; the Existence of God; permanence of the Divine Command and Sovereignty; the negation of compulsion in religion; the concept of benevolence and Divine Guidance; the refutation of injustice and misguidance on the part of God Almighty. At the end are discussed two important economic issues: disbursement and usury (*riba*) from the stand-point of the Qur'an. With this discussion the second volume concludes.

The Third Volume

It commences with the exposition of the beginning verses of the *Surat Aal-Imran* (the third chapter of the Qur'an), which contains 200 verses out of which 120 are commented upon in this volume till the page 361.

The various issues discussed in this book consist of : the Qur'anic meaning of chastisement; an elaborate discussion about the problem of the *al-ayat al-muhkamat* and the *al-ayat al-mutashabihat* and *ta'wil* (interpretation), distributed in five sections (these three issues of significance in the Qur'an have been discussed logically and analysed carefully in an unprecedented manner); these five sections are summarized under ten subjects, and in their context the problem of interpretation by conjecture (*tafsir bi al-ra'y*) has also been discussed from the Qur'anic and traditionalist (*riwa'i*) points of view. Then there are comparatively short discussions about certain other problems like the Qur'anic notions of sustenance, property; validity (*i'tibar*) and its Qur'anic basis (*istinad*); and all other matters related to these issues.

After that, there is a comprehensive discussion regarding Jesus ('a), Mary ('a) and the concept of trinity (*tathlith*). These matters have been studied from various angles. Then, there are two separate discussions of historical nature concerning the Old Testament, the New Testament, Christ and the Four Gospels (Luke, Matthew, Mark and John). All of their different aspects have been carefully studied and analysed.

This volume comes to an end with the Qur'anic and historical account of the history of the Holy Ka'bah and other related matters.

The Fourth Volume

This volume opens with the exposition of the 121st verse of the *Surat Aal-Imran*, which continues till page 133. From page 134 begins the exposition of the *Surat al-Nisa'* (Women), which has 186 verses, and it continues till the end of this volume which has 424 pages. Seventy-six verses of this *surah* are

discussed in this volume. Some of the important subjects discussed in this volume are as follows: the teachings of the Qur'an and their role in the reconciliation of knowledge and action ; the trial or test and its real meaning; the remission of sins and forgiveness in the Qur'an; the problem of *tawakkul* (resignation to the Divine Will) ; with reference to the verse 172 of the *Surat Aal-Imran* and its preceding and following verses dealing with the Battle of Uhud, a list of the names of the 77 martyrs of Uhud is given from page 74 to 77; a philosophical discussion based on a comparative study of the Qur'an and the Old Testament regarding the rights of women ; and the Qur'anic view of social relations in Islam in fifteen sections.

This is the most important discussion of this volume which commences from page 92 and ends at page 131. It may be considered to be one of the profoundest and the most original of the discourses of *al-Mizan*, which brings to light some very sensitive and subtle points about Islamic sociology in the light of the relevant verses of the *Surat al-Nisa'* (Women) pertaining to the age of human beings, the emergence of the first man, the process of creation and evolution and other related matters. Afterwards, there is a discussion about marriage from a scientific point of view, divided into three sections. The third section is devoted to the issue of polygamy in Islam with reference to the question of the number of the wives of the Prophet (S). The philosophical implications of these issues are discussed thoroughly.

Subsequent to it, the issue of inheritance and succession is discussed from different angles in eight sections. Besides, there are several brief discussions about repentance, mortal sins (*kabai'r*), venial sins (*sagha'ir*), atonement of sins, specification of the relatives with whom it is lawful to marry, and the meaning of the authority of men over women. The last discussion of this volume concerns the Qur'anic view of *ghayrah* (the sense of honour) and *'asabiyyah* (prejudice).

The Fifth Volume

It commences with the exposition of verse 77 of the *Surat al Nisa'* and concludes with the exposition of verse 54 of the *Surat al-Ma'idah* on page 402. The following subjects are discussed in this volume: a discussion about determining the nature of sins and virtues with relation to Divine injunction; discussions concerning three Qur'anic terms: *tahiyyah* (variously meaning salutation, compliment, congratulation, prayer, benediction), *mustad'af* (the oppressed), and *'ismah* (infallibility of freedom from sins).

The exposition of the *Surat al Ma'idah* begins from page 158. The first discussion under this *surah* concerns the Qur'anic sense of *'aqd* (contract). With reference to the verse of Surat al-Ma'idah, 5: 1:

أَحَلَّتْ لَكُمْ بِهِمَّةُ الْأَنْعَامِ

And its following verse, the 'permissibility of the flesh of various animals is discussed. He discusses this issue logically and scientifically in three sections, and the Islamic view in this respect is compared with those of other religions.

The other significant discussion concerns the problem of the right approach to the Qur'an and to the history of Islamic thought. In this context the meaning of perception and thinking is discussed from various angles. Then follow the following discussions: the Qur'anic accounts of the sons of Adam ('a) and its comparison with the Biblical version of the story; the Qur'anic conception of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) and the difference between *shari'ah*, *din* and *millah*, the afflictions of the heart; and an account of the incidents that will occur during the age of the twelfth Imam, according to the Qur'anic verses and the traditions.

The Sixth Volume

The sixth volume commences with the exposition of verse 55 of the *Surat al-Ma'idah*, 5:55:

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

and ends with the last verse of the *surah*. This volume which consists of 381 pages gives the exposition of 65 verses.

It deals with the following issues in the light of these verses: the meaning of *tawhid* in the Qur'an in the light of the tradition and history; a scientific and historical analysis of the knowledge of the self (In nine sections); witness (*shahadah*) and justice ('*adalah*) and taking of oath (*qasam*) with reference to its brief history ; propriety of conduct and training (an ethical discourse in eight sections, containing the conduct of the prophets of God in general and the moral aspects of the teachings of our Prophet [S] in detail, enumerating 183 of his moral qualities in the light of the tradition).

In the context of verse 118 of *Surat al-Ma'idah*, 5:118:

إِنْ تَعَذَّبْتُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ عِبَادُكَ

The problem of slavery is discussed in its social and historical perspectives. 'Allamah Tabataba'i has analysed this problem in the light of the verses of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (S) and the Imams ('a). Like many other discourses of *al-Mizan*, this study possesses rare quality and originality reflecting the 'Allamah's profound vision and subtlety of style.

The last section deals with the issue of punishment (*mujazat*) and forgiveness ('*afw*), comprising seven sections. It is a profound discussion held in the light of the Qur'anic verses. Various issues arising from these two subjects are discussed logically in a comprehensive manner. With this discussion the volume and the exposition of the *Surat al-Ma'idah* concludes.

The Seventh Volume

This volume commences with the exposition of the first verse of the *Surat al-‘An‘am* (Cattle). This volume, which extends over 397 pages, deals with the exposition of 165 verses of this *surah*. Among the significant discussions of this volume the first is about animals and their social system, and is based on the Qur’anic outlook. There are two other discussions: one about the subject of command, elucidating the point that it belongs exclusively to God, and the other about the meaning and reality of the Divine Act and Command.

Then, the story of Abraham (‘a) with an account of his personality is discussed in six chapters covering the Qur’anic, scientific and historical views. Subsequently, six other subjects are discussed in the following order: the meaning of the Book (the *Kitab*), Command and blessing (*barakah*) in the Qur’an; daughter and her children are also considered to be descendants and heirs in Islam; the phenomenon of creation and its applicability to all beings; and the Divine Guidance.

The Eighth Volume

This volume consists of 387 pages and deals with the exposition of the *Surat al-‘A‘raf* which has 206 verses.

The first discussion of this volume is about the Devil (Iblis), his actions and the objections he raised claiming his superiority over Adam. The problem of *sa‘adah* and *shaqawah* (felicity and misery) is discussed in the light of the Qur’an and the tradition, and has been studied and analysed in an elaborate manner. The meaning of *A‘raf* (the heights) in the Qur’an is discussed, and after that in the context of the 54th verse of *Surat al-‘A‘raf*:

ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ

“He sat on the Throne” (7:54).

There is an analysis of the term *‘arsh* (the Throne) and its referent is determined in the light of the Qur’an and the tradition. On the same lines the Qur’anic concept of *ru‘yat al-qalb* (inner vision) is discussed.

In the context of the 180th verse of *al-‘A‘raf*:

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ

“And Allah’s are the fairest Names” (7: 108).

There is a discussion about 'the fairest Names' based on the verses of the Qur'an and rational arguments, and can be considered as one of the most significant parts of this volume; it consists of seven sections. With the support of Qur'anic verses and traditions this subject is discussed in a comprehensive way. Without letting himself be swayed away by secondary issues, like the problem of the meanings of the Names of God, 'Allamah Tabataba'i has embraced all important aspects of this subject.

The Ninth Volume

This volume covers the exposition of two complete *surahs*: *al Anfal* (175 verses) and *al-Tawbah* (129 verses). Significant discussions of this book are as follows:

1) In the context of the seventh verse of *Surat al-Anfal*:

وَإِذْ يَعِدُكُمُ اللَّهُ إِحْدَى الطَّائِفَتَيْنِ

“And when Allah promised you one of the two parties...” (8:7).

And its following verses about the Battle of Badr, Allamah Tabataba'i has given a list of the names of the martyrs of Badr, who were fourteen in number: six from among the *Muhajirun* (immigrants) and eight from among the *Ansar* (helpers, who were the natives of al-Madinah.)

2) A discussion about the meanings of *'ahd* (promise, or treaty), *qasam* (oath), and *ahkam* (commands or injunctions), and their implications. This issue is discussed in four sections.

3) A dialectical and philosophical study of the relationship of succession between the acts and their causes.

4) In the context of the 25th verse of the *Surat al-Tawbah*:

لَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ فِي مَوَاطِنَ كَثِيرَةٍ ۖ وَيَوْمَ حُنَيْنٍ

“Certainly, Allah helped you in many battlefields and at Hunayn...” (9:25).

and its following verses concerning the Battle of Hunayn, the names of the martyrs, who were approximately ten in number, are mentioned.

5 & 6) Under two separate headings *kantz* (treasure or accumulation of wealth) and *zakat* and other kinds of almsgiving and deeds of charity are discussed in the light of the Qur'anic verses and the tradition. 'Allamah Tabataba'i has in a way elucidated basic economic problems from Islamic viewpoint.

The Tenth Volume

This volume which consists of 384 pages gives the exegesis of all 109 verses of the *Surat Yunus* and 99 verses of the *Surat Hud*. Most of the discussions bear the Qur'anic, historical and philosophical facets. The first discussion which is philosophical in nature and is based on Qur'anic verses is about the power possessed by prophets of God and Divinely inspired persons. Then, there is an elaborate discussion about Noah ('a) in seven sections dealing in detail with various aspects of this subject. In this context there is a discussion concerning the flood and as to whether the entire earth was engulfed by it or only a part of it was affected.

The Allamah has taken into account the geological evidence of this event in eight sections, and sought to interpret scientifically the Qur'anic verses about Noah's Flood in a comprehensive manner.

The second significant topic of this volume is about the practice of idol worship, studied in ten sections in the light of different viewpoints, viz. Qur'anic, traditional, historical and philosophical.

From among the last ten sections of this volume, two sections are about the defence of the principle of *tawhid* in Islam, the struggle against idol worship, the rejection of infidelity and affirmation of the principle of *tawhid* as the basis of the Prophet's character. It throws light on the above-mentioned issues from all angles, and is free from any aimless and ambiguous distractions. Afterwards we come to the concept of transmigration of soul among idolaters and the infiltration of this idea into some religions and its rejection by Islam. In the end, the notion of intercession and redemption in Islam has been discussed.

The third topic of discussion in this volume is the life and times of Hud ('a), which is divided into two parts: one about the people of 'Ad, to whom Hud was sent, and the other about his own personality. The fourth topic of discussion concerns Salih ('a), the people of Thamud, and the mission and personality of Salih. The fifth discussion of this volume deals with the story of Lot ('a), his people and his personality, as narrated by the Qur'an and the Bible. At the end of the volume, the story of Shu'ayb and his people is described in three sections.

The Eleventh Volume

It consists of 390 pages and commences with the exposition of the 100th verse of the *Surat Hud*. The exposition of this *surah* concludes on page 72 of this volume. Exposition of the *Surat Yusuf*, which has 111 verses, begins from page 73 of this volume and ends on page 282. It is followed by the exposition of the *Surat al Ra'd*, which has 43 verses, and the volume concludes with this *surah*.

Among the significant topics of discussions in this volume, the first one is as to how falsehood cannot save any human being. This is a discussion based on the verses of the Qur'an and rational arguments. This is followed by a discussion about religious piety and its various grades, in three sections. 'Allamah Tabataba'i has expounded this instructive and useful subject with great profundity. The third discussion of this volume concerns the history and life of Yusuf ('a), divided into three sections.

The fourth discourse is about dreams, discussed in four sections. The interpretation of different kinds of dreams is discussed from various scientific angles, and the Qur'anic standpoint in this regard is also clarified.

It consists of 382 pages and includes the exposition of three complete surahs, that is, the *Surat Ibrahim* (52 verses), the *Surat al-Hijr* (99 verses) and *al-Nahl* (128 verses).

In the first discourse of this volume, the subject of vengeance is discussed with respect to God Almighty. The second discourse is among the most profound of the discussion of *al-Mizan*, and deals with the issue of *tahrif* (falsification or transposition) and alteration in the Qur'an. This issue is discussed rationally in the light of the traditions and the historical facts. It is divided into seven sections.

The 'Allamah has logically refuted all possibilities of *tahrif* in the Qur'an with great philosophical and analytical insight into the contents of the Qur'an. He has answered various questions and objections raised in connection with the matter of *tahrif* in the Qur'an.

The third discussion is about the verdict concerning the creation of man in the context of the exposition of verse 26 of the *Surat al-Hijr*. It comprises the interpretations of ten Divine verdicts occurring in the Qur'an. The fourth and the last discussion of this volume is about duty, its various modes and its persistence, dealt with in a philosophical way.

The Thirteenth Volume

It consists of 408 pages and contains expositions of two complete *surahs*, that is, *al-Isra'* or *Bani Isra'il* (111 verses) and *al-Kahf* (110 verses).

The first and the most significant discussion of this volume is about the problem of justice. The issue is approached both philosophically and traditionally, and covers three sections. Then, in the context of the verse:

وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزِّنَىٰ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

“And come not near unto adultery. Lo! it is an abomination and an evil way” (17:32).

the 32nd verse of *Surat Bani Isra'il*, there is a discussion about the prohibition of adultery (*hurmat al-zina*), which is approached from both sociologic Qur'anic points of view, highlighting the detrimental effects of this act studied and compared from different angles. In the same way, other issues like that of the superiority of man over angels or vice versa, place of evil and its relation to the Divine destiny (*qada*), homogeneity or necessary relationship between deeds and the doer also has been discussed with reference to the verses of the *Surat Bani Isra'il*.

The issues associated with the exposition of the *Surat al-Kahf* are mostly based on Qur'anic verses and history, for they are concerned with the story of the Companions of the Cave (Ashab al-Kahf). The problems related to it are dealt with in four sections. Similarly, the story of Moses ('a) and Khidr ('a) and that of Dhu al-Qarnayn are discussed from various viewpoints. This volume concludes with these discussions.

The Fourteenth Volume

This volume has 416 pages and contains the exposition of four *surahs*:

(1) *the Surat Maryam* (Mary) (98 verses);

(2) *the Surat Ta-Ha* (135 verses);

(3) *the Surat al-'Anbiya'* (112 verses); and

(4) *al-Hajj* (78 verses).

The important discussions of this book are about the incidents and events of the lives, histories and personalities of four of the prophets of God, viz, Zakariyya ('a); Yahya ('a); Isma'il ('a) the truthful, and Idris ('a), which are based on the Qur'anic verses, the tradition and history. In the course of these discussions, with reference to the verse:

فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا

“...Then We sent Our Spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man” (19: 17).

In the 17th verse of the *Surat Maryam*, there is a profound discussion about resemblance (in an allegorical sense) with reference to the appearance of Gabriel in human form. This is one of the most valuable discourses of *al-Mizan*.

The other significant discussion of this volume concerns the meaning of the necessity of Action, and its propriety and impropriety in relation to God Almighty. This issue is discussed from a rational point of view. There is another discussion about the problem of contingency or eternity of *Kalam Allah*, that is, the Qur'an. The various aspects of this problem are taken into consideration with an emphasis on the traditions. The discussion consists of four sections.

At the end of the volume, there is a very important discussion about Divine Wisdom. This is a philosophical discussion based on the Qur'anic verses, and 'Allamah Tabataba'i has treated this subject with great scholarship and insight.

The Fifteenth Volume

This volume has 408 pages and contains the exposition of five complete *surahs* in the following order:

- (1) the *Surat al-Mu'minun* (118 verses);
- (2) the *Surat al-Nur* (64 verses);
- (3) the *Surat al-Furqan* (77 verses);
- (4) *Surat al-Shu'ara* (227 verses);
- (5) the *Surat al-Naml* (93 verses).

The general and significant topics of this volume are as follows: The first discussion is about the effects of faith and its practical implications. From this study issues a sociological and judicial discussion which covers the laws of Islam and their significance for human society. This discourse is followed by three philosophical and rational studies:

- (1) the causality of the Divine Being in relation to things;
- (2) the relationship of particular beings with the knowledge of God;
- (3) similar study of the meaning and implications of the negation of Divine injustice.

'Allamah Tabataba'i probes these three profound issues with his characteristic meticulousness and penetrating insight as he has done in other such discussions.

The last discussion of this volume concerns Sulayman ('a) in the light of the verses of the *Surat al-Naml*, and it consists of four sections dealing with the life and personality of Sulayman ('a) in the Qur'anic perspective. Similarly, all ancient sources are also studied and the legends and reports about him in the ancient literature are discussed in their proper historical perspective.

The Sixteenth Volume

This volume consists of 395 pages and contains the exposition of seven complete *surahs*:

- (1) *al-Qasas* (88 verses);
- (2) *al-Ankabut* (69 verses);
- (3) *al-Rum* (60 verses);
- (4) *Luqman* (34 verses);

(5) *al-Sajdah* (30 verses);

(6) *al-Ahzab* (73 verses);

(7) *Saba'* (54 verses).

The significant issues taken up in this volume are as follows:

At first, in relation with the *Surat al-Qasas*, the anecdotes pertaining to Moses ('a) have been discussed in four sections. This is a discussion based on historical facts and the Qur'anic verses encompassing various aspects of the subject.

Then, in the context of the 30th verse of the *Surat al-Rum*:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۖ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

“Then set your face upright for religion in the right state—the nature made by Allah in which He has made men” (30:30).

There is a comprehensive and logical discussion about religion and faith as a natural propensity of the human mind. It consists of four sections, from page 189 to 193. None of the exegeses of the Qur'an contains such a profound discussion about this subject.

Subsequent to it, in the context of the *Surat Luqman*, there is a discussion about the anecdote of Luqman ('a) the wise, and some of his wise sayings and parables have been expounded. The last discourse, which is considered to be one of the most valuable discussions of *al Mizan*, is about the creation of the First Man, and is undertaken in the context of the verse:

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ۖ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِنْ طِينٍ

“Who made good everything that He has created, and He created man from clay” (32:7).

From the Qur'anic, philosophical, traditional and historical angles this problem is studied and expounded. In the beginning of this discussion, 'Allamah Tabataba'i refers to his earlier discussion of this subject in detail in the beginning of his exposition of the *Surat al-Nisa*. It commences from page 225 and concludes on page 260 of this volume.

The Seventeenth Volume

It consists of 407 pages, and contains the exposition of seven complete *surahs*:

(1) *Fatir* (45 verses);

(2) *Yasin* (83 verses);

(3) *al-Saffat* (182 verses);

(4) *Sad* (88 verses);

(5) *al-Zumar* (75 verses);

(6) *al-Mu'min* (85 verses) ;

(7) *Ha Mim (Fussilat)* (54 verses).

Foremost in importance is a discussion in the context of the first verse of the *Surat Fatir*:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنَحَةٍ مَثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ ۖ يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

“Praise be to Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Who appoints the angels, messengers having wings, two, three and four; He increases in creation what He pleases; surely Allah has power over all things” (53: 1).

This discussion about angels covers all the verses about them in the Qur'an as well as all kinds of issues related to this subject. Afterward, there is a discussion about the subject of prognostication, with reference to the prophets of God with reference to the 10th verse of *al-Saffat*:

إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ

“Except him who snatches off but once, then there follows him a brightly piercing flame” (37: 10).

This verse is about Satan, and as a subsidiary issue the meaning and nature of meteors or shooting stars is discussed.

Then, the anecdotes of different prophets of God, like Ilyas ('a), Jonah ('a), David ('a), Ayyub ('a), Jesus ('a) and Dhu al-Kifl ('a) have been discussed according to their Qur'anic version and in the light of the tradition. This is the lengthiest discussion of this volume which covers most of the issues taken up in this volume.

In the concluding part of the volume there is a discussion about the meaning of *rida* and *sukht* (satisfaction or displeasure with God). This discussion is based on the Qur'anic verses and rational arguments. There is a discussion about heaven; and then the issue of the all embracing knowledge of God Almighty about the living beings is discussed from the Qur'anic and philosophical points of view.

The Eighteenth Volume

This volume which consists of 392 pages contains the exposition of ten complete surahs of the Qur'an:

- (1) al-Shura (53 verses);
- (2) al-Zukhruf (89 verses);
- (3) al-Dukhan (59 verses);
- (4) al-Jathiyah (37 verses);
- (5) al-ahqaf (35 verses);
- (6) Muhammad (38 verses);
- (7) al-Fath (29 verses);
- (8) al-Hujurat (18 verses);
- (9) Qaf (45 verses);
- (10) al-Dhariyat (60 verses).

The significant discussions of this volume relate to four subjects. The first discussion is about the subject of the knowledge possessed by the Prophet (S) and the Imams ('a), which includes refutation of a doubt in this regard. The second discussion is about faith and how it is strengthened. The third discussion is about the subject of fraternity and brotherhood, while the fourth discussion of this volume is about equal distribution of provisions, property and wealth.

All the discussions of this volume are remarkable for their scholarly and comprehensive nature and rationalistic approach.

The Nineteenth Volume

Now, gradually we are coming nearer to the last *surahs* of the Qur'an. This one and the following volume deal with a large number of Qur'anic *surahs*. This volume which consists of 407 pages contains exposition of eighteen complete surahs:

- (1) *al-Tur* (49 verses);
- (2) *al-Najm* (62 verses);
- (3) *al-Qamar* (55 verses);

- (4) *al-Rahman* (78 verses);
- (5) *al-Waqiah* (96 verses);
- (6) *al-Hadid* (29 verses);
- (7) *al-Mujadalah* (22 verses);
- (8) *al-Hashr* (24 verses);
- (9) *al-Mumtahinah* (13 verses);
- (10) *al-Saff* (14 verses);
- (11) *al-Jumu'ah* (11 verses);
- (12) *al-Munafiqun* (11 verses);
- (13) *al-Taghabun* (18 verses);
- (14) *al-Talaq* (12 verses);
- (15) *al-Tahrim* (12 verses);
- (16) *al-Mulk* (30 verses);
- (17) *al-Qalam* (52 verses);
- (18) *al-Haqqah* (52 verses).

The first important discussion of this volume, which is a short one, is about the miracle of the Prophet (S) resulting in the splitting of the moon (*shaqq al-qamar*). The most significant discussion of this volume concerns the lucky and unlucky effects of the days which consists of three sections: 1. lucky and unlucky effects of the days; 2. lucky and unlucky influences of the stars; 3. good omens and bad omens.

There is a discussion concerning the Divine providence or decree "*qadar*", which is followed by the analysis of the meaning of 'the teaching of wisdom' (*ta'lim al-hikmah*), and uses both the Qur'anic verses and rational arguments.

The last discussion of this volume is concerned with the subject of hypocrisy (*nifaq*) during the early days of Islam. This discussion is based on the Qur'anic verses and historical facts in the context of the *Surat al-Munafiqun*. Like other discussions of al-Mizan, this also reveals the keen observation of the author and his understanding of the most sensitive points, which uncover the ugly visage of the hypocrites and their unholy aims and the losses inflicted by them on the Muslims and Islam during the course of history of Islam.

The Twentieth Volume

After outlining the general principles according to which 'Allamah Tabataba'i has discussed and analysed various subjects in the nineteen volumes of al-Mizan, we open its twentieth and last volume with a view to enumerate the special subjects discussed in it.

This volume, which has 339 pages, contains the exposition of the last 45 short surahs of the Qur'an, that is, from the *Surat al-Ma'arij*, which is the seventieth *surah* of the Qur'an, to *al-Nas*, the last and the hundred and fourteenth *surah*. The various subjects discussed in this book in the context of the surahs of the Qur'an are as follows:

1. A discussion about the Jinn.
2. A discussion about hypocrisy (*nifaa*), which is complementary to the discussion, started in the nineteenth volume.
3. A discussion about the nature of man from the viewpoint of the Qur'an.
4. A discussion about the oaths in the Qur'an, that is, a list of the things or beings by which God swears in His Holy Book.
5. A discussion about the meaning of soul (*ruh*) in the Qur'an.
6. A discussion as to how angels serve as the agencies of administration in the system of existence.

With these studies the exegesis al-Mizan concludes. Benedictions be on the blessed soul of 'Allamah Tabataba'i for its guiding us in exploring and understanding this unfathomable ocean of meaning and ideas. We read it and benefit from it according to our limited talents and capacities. We hope that greater efforts will be made to publish and distribute this encyclopaedic exegesis, which is unparalleled in the history of the commentaries of the Qur'an.

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