

The Speech of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Imam Seyed Ali Khamenei, in a Meeting with the Organizers of Allamah Tabatabaei's International Congress - 15 /Nov/ 2023

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds, and Allah's blessings be bestowed upon the prophet Mohammad and his holy family, especially Imam Mahdi.

A warm welcome to you, dear brothers and sisters. I am sincerely grateful for the great job you have done [in organising this international congress]. This is one the best deeds to have been performed these days; you thought of it, Allah inspired you, did your best, and accomplished it, this commemoration of a great man, an outstanding historical character among the Islamic clergy.

The late Allamah Tabatabai has been one of the rare marvels in our seminaries [i.e., religious centres] throughout centuries. Honestly, [he is] a rare phenomenon. His traits are all distinguished human virtues—I will mention them briefly. All the characteristics which form this man's personality are distinguished virtues of an individual. I have noted some of these features, for example, knowledge, piety and abstinence, moral traits, finesse and artistry, amiability, loyalty, friendship, good fellowship and the like, and there are many other attributes I do not think necessary to mention. The combination of these features forms the personality of this great man, and each of these characteristics is one of the many human virtues. I have noted some aspects to consider about this honourable character's knowledge. The first is the variety of this remarkable man's vast knowledge—he was a rare marvel. Historically, we have seen individuals like Shaikh Tousi or Allamah Helli with extensive knowledge in various areas, but such a phenomenon is infrequent at our time. I do not know anyone else with such a variety of knowledge.

He is a religious jurist who believes in principles; he is a philosopher who seriously ponders theoretical mysticism; he is skilled in astronomy and mathematics; he is an outstanding interpreter and scholar in Quranic sciences in which he is a rare example; he is a poet and well-versed in literature; he is an active expert in genealogy. In addition to his philosophy and mysticism, Mr. Tabatabaei is well-versed in genealogy. He has a chart in which he introduces the Qadhi-Tabatabai family. It is a historical table, published and available, and in my view, an excellent piece of art. My late father, who was a close friend of Mr Tabatabai in Najaf, told me himself that he corresponded with Mr Tabatabai, asking him to get our lineage from a famous person in Qom and send it to him. Mr. Tabatabai replied that he knew as much or more as that famous person—I have forgotten his exact words. [Thus,] he arranged our family tree and sent it [for my father]. Mr. Tabatabai has prepared our present family tree. One can observe a strange variety of knowledge in this person. As I mentioned as an example, he was learned in mathematics and astronomy. It is well-known that Allamah Tabatabai drew the plan for Hojjatiyeh School. He was a genuinely perfect architect. This wide range of knowledge is a specific aspect of Mr. Tabatabai's intellect.

Another aspect is the depth of his knowledge and thought. He has a deep understanding of the sciences we know. First of all, he has his basics in the principles of jurisprudence. I have not seen any work in jurisprudence [by

Allamah Tabatabai], but he has his basics. His commentaries on *Al-Kefayat* (2) reveal this. He is an innovative philosopher. He presents a new philosophical structure manifested in his *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, and later, in his two last published books: *Bidayat* and *Nihayat*. He is a wonderful exegete, in my opinion. Looking at *Tafsir Al-Mizan* [*Al-Mizan Exegesis*], one will instantly realise that it is indeed a surprising interpretation in number, variety, and depth of content—I will later mention some points. So, this is another example illustrating the depth of his knowledge and thought.

Another aspect of the academics of this honourable person is his efforts in training disciples—a very peculiar training he has. Training disciples is one of the abilities any scholar should have. We have scholars who are famous for training disciples and have many—the late Mr. Tabatabai is one of them. Tehran has long been the centre of the philosophers of the recent philosophical era in Iran. Still, none of them has had as many outstanding philosophy disciples as the late Mr. Tabatabai. The current philosophical era in Iran starts from the period of the late Mullah Abdullah Zenuazi and his son Ali Hakim. It extends to the late Mirza Jelveh and Mirza Asadullah Qomshei—famous in theosophy and philosophy—who gathered mainly in Tehran and some others in other places, such as the late Haji Sabzewari in Sabzewar, one or two in Qom, one or two in Isfahan, and one or two in Mashhad—all outstanding in philosophy. For instance, Haji Sabzewari had numerous students who participated in his classes, one of them the late Akhund Khurasani. However, Akhund Khurasani is not a philosopher but a religious jurist who studied a little philosophy. Philosophy disciples such as Martyr Motahhari, Martyr Beheshti, the late Mr. Mesbah, and others and even some other respected philosophers who are present now have not been trained by scholars other than the late Mr. Tabatabai. This is the issue of teaching disciples. The philosophical era in Iran continues through contemporary philosophers who were in Tehran, [such as] the late A-Mirza Ahmad Ashtiyani, before him the late A-Mirza Mahdi Ashtiyani, or the late Mr. Amoli (3) (May all of them be at peace in Paradise). They were philosophers but did not typically train disciples as much as Mr Tabatabai did. Allamah Tabatabai revitalised philosophy and truly trained philosophers.

An interesting point about Allamah's students—most of them—is that they played roles in the Islamic revolution. Many Assembly of Experts members who compiled the constitution were the late Mr. Tabatabai's disciples. Some of those currently in the Assembly of Experts and, before that, at the time the constitution was being written—the late Mr Motahhari was among them—were the late Mr Tabatabai students. Many well-known martyrs of the Islamic revolution were Mr. Tabatabai's students: Martyr Motahhari, Martyr Beheshti, Martyr Ghodduzi, and Martyr A-Shaikh Ali Heidari Nahavandi. Such outstanding martyrs were Mr. Tabatabai's students (May he be at peace in Paradise). Thanks to Allah, some of his students are still alive and are sources of great benefits.

Another point regarding the academic issue is that his works were published and the advantages seen during his lifetime. The late Mr Tabatabai himself was not as well-known as *Al-Mizan* or, for example, his theosophical books. In other words, he did not boast [or show off] at all. Still, his books were discussed everywhere: His *Al-Mizan*, *Principles of Philosophy*, *Bidayat* and *Nihayat*, *Shiite in Islam*, *Quran in Islam*, and numerous other dissertations were published during his lifetime. Therefore, the late Mr. Tabatabai's academic knowledge is an exclusive attribute we elaborated on.

Regarding the features of piety, abstinence, devoted worship, and his devotion [and love] to the Ahl al-Bayt [i.e., the family of the prophet Mohammad] and such characteristics—which have been mentioned a lot, we have all heard and everyone knows, [so] I do not want to repeat them. Allamah was excellent; he was a remarkable, pre-eminent, righteous, and restrained human. However, two of the outstanding traits of the late Mr. Tabatabai have attracted and absorbed my attention. The first is Mr Tabatabai's rare intellectual endeavour, 'jihad', in the incursion of foreign and exotic thoughts—truthfully in the climax. Those who have not experienced that period may not consider the

situation of the youth in Iran at that time or the intellectual environment. There was indeed an attack on its real meaning, whether exotic school and cult thoughts, such as Marxism, or creating scepticism, not as in presenting a school of thought, [but instead in] creating doubt. This was what the late Mr. Motahhari (May he be at peace in Paradise) was determined to confront, and most of his books dealt with the scepticism of those days. In the climax of these events, the late Mr. Tabatabai (May he be at peace in Paradise) created a firm intellectual base with an aggressive stand. People who learned his thoughts realised his outlook on Marxism and other various schools of thought was not defensive but aggressive.

One instance is the books of Mr. Motahhari (May he be at peace in Paradise) [which are well-known]. This intellectual base was framed by Mr. Tabatabai, both with *Principles of Philosophy* and his [Quranic] interpretive statements—this [Quranic] exegesis is an abundance of social and political sciences. In addition to epistemic topics, intellectual basics, wisdom, and the like, as well as the particular interpretive aspects which clarify the [Quranic] verses, *Al-Mizan*—a sporadic series in this aspect—is rich in social and political issues which were not discussed at all at that time. Considering these issues today, one realises that these topics still concern us. The late Mr. Tabatabai created this intellectual aggressive base. Let us learn this from Mr. Tabatabai: creating intellectual bases that fill the gaps and are aggressive, not passive or defensive. This is a feature that is very intriguing to me. The second attribute, which is also outstanding and essential, is that he was not satisfied with thinking only about monotheistic and heavenly teachings. He believed in those truths and teachings in his noble soul and heart. Indeed, the late Mr. Tabatabai was an example of this precious [Quranic] verse: “Purified words ascend towards Him, and good deeds place him in a higher level” (4). The “purified words” had indeed become part of his soul. The moral characteristics he is famous for—extraordinary decency and indifference to passions—are all the culmination of this concept. His patience and decency result from the fulfilment of those concepts and elevated teachings in his soul. He trained and educated himself. He went through the excellent human characteristics and understanding, got to the top and went beyond. Thus, he was [physically] among the people, but [spiritually] with Allah. [Seeing him and] interacting with him, one truly felt he did not consider himself as someone special. He was patient; he treated others gently, even those who argued or disagreed with him—he behaved patiently and forgave them. He was extremely modest, which sometimes astonished others. Let me tell you, gentlemen, a memory. The late Allamah Semnani (May he be at peace in Paradise), an elderly, famous, respected mullah and Semnan resident, came to Qom. Scholars kept visiting him, so his house was [always] crowded. One day, as I was sitting in my ‘hijrah’ [a private room in howzeh], a friend of mine who sincerely respected, praised, and loved Mr Tabatabai entered excitedly and said, “No one can be as good in behaviour and as loyal as my man” (6). I asked him what had happened. He said he had been in Allamah Semnani’s house, and Mr. Khomeini, Mr. Tabatabai, and others were also there. Allamah Semnani had addressed Mr Khomeini and said, “Sir! I have seen your Tafsir Al-Mizan. It was perfect; it was excellent. I truly took pleasure [in reading it],” and he had started praising Tafsir Al-Mizan, assuming Mr Khomeini is Mr Tabatabai. Mr. Khomeini was not a person to panic in such situations, [so] he was silent and said nothing. Mr. Tabatabai, sitting on the other side, faced Allamah Semnani and said, “Sir! I am Tabatabai. He is my teacher, Mr. Khomeini.” [My friend repeated:] “No one can be as good in behaviour and as loyal as my man.” Meaning that he was impressed by this [behaviour of Mr. Tabatabai].

The late Mr Tabatabai, with spiritual, academic, behavioural, and other traits we know about now, was a sweet and pleasant human in character and friendship. He had pleasant sessions; he spoke sweetly and pleasingly; he talked well and appealingly; he liked to talk about various things charmingly. In meetings with his close friends, one did not observe the silent mode one saw in his public discussion and teaching sessions. He did not have that characteristic. He was charming and warm. He spoke sweetly and appealingly. If he talked of something, he would embellish [and elaborate] it and go into detail. He had such a character: comprehensive, tasteful, virtuous, poetic, and literary. He had all the features an outstanding and supreme human could have.

In my viewpoint, the two attributes I have put forth, that is, the issue of filling in the gaps and attaining the teachings one knows in one's soul — “the heart of the mystic is fearful of You” (7), knowing mysticism is different from [the true meaning of this prayer]: “the heart of the mystic is fearful of You”—are two different things. We should note this: we should all try to acquire these two features; whoever wants to go through this path should act in accordance with them.

I hope, God willing, the Glorious Allah will raise his status and place us among those who are grateful to him [Mr. Tabatabai]. Thanks to Allah, Allah's blessings for him are such [as you see]. Mr. Tabatabai is much more well-known today than he was in his lifetime. Maybe during his lifetime, he was not known even one-tenth the amount he is known now. Thanks to Allah, he is now recognised in Iran, in academic assemblies, and the world, to some extent, and he will be much more well-known [in the future], God willing.

May Allah bless you all.

Footnotes:

1) At the beginning of this meeting, Gholam-Reza Fayyazi (Chairman of the Board of the High Assembly of Islamic 'Hikmat' and Head of the Congress), Hamid Parsania (Member of the Board of the High Assembly of Islamic 'Hikmat' and Scientific Secretary of the Congress), and Mohammad-Baqer Khorasani (Administration Manager of the High Assembly of Islamic 'Hikmat' and Executive Secretary of the Congress) presented reports.

2) *Hashiyat al-Kefayat*.

3) Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Amoli.

4) Quran: Surah Fatir, Verse 10.

5) Ayatollah Mohammad-Saleh Hayeri Mazandarani (known as Allamah Semnani).

6) Hafiz, *Collection of Poems, Sonnets*.

7) *Kamel al-Ziyaraat*, p. 40, Ziyarat Amin-Allah.