

Sufi Hermeneutics of the Quranic Hierarchy of the Soul in Tafsīr Al-Mīzan

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Abstract

This study examines the Sufistic interpretation of the verses on the levels of the soul (*nafs*) in *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī. The study is motivated by ongoing debates regarding *Shi'a* Quranic exegesis, which is often considered doctrinally biased, despite the moderate and philosophical characteristics of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*. The research aims to analyze Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation of the levels of the soul and to identify its Sufistic dimensions. This research employs a qualitative library research approach using descriptive and content analysis methods. The primary source is *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, while secondary sources include classical and contemporary works on Quranic exegesis, Sufism, and related scholarly studies. The findings reveal that Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets the levels of the soul *nafs al-ammārah*, *nafs al-lawwāmah*, *nafs al-muṭma'innah*, and *nafs al-ṣākiyyah* through a balanced synthesis of textual evidence, rational analysis, and spiritual insight. His interpretation emphasizes self-purification, divine guidance, repentance, and spiritual perfection while avoiding excessive sectarian tendencies. The study concludes that *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* offers a comprehensive and moderate Sufistic interpretation that remains relevant for contemporary Quranic studies and Islamic spiritual development.

INTRODUCTION

In the study of Islamic exegesis, there are various methods of interpretation developed by scholars, one of which is Sufi exegesis. This form of exegesis seeks to explore the esoteric or inner meanings of the verses of the Quran, interpreting the text not only literally but also based on spiritual experience, mystical intuition, and a philosophical approach to divinity. One of the key figures who developed Sufi exegesis within the Islamic tradition, particularly within the Shia school of thought, is Ṭabāṭabā'ī. According to az-Ẓahabī, Shia exegetes tend to interpret Quranic verses in light of Shia doctrines, such as wilāyah, Imāmah, the infallibility of the Imams, and taqīyyah. Az-Ẓahabī criticizes this approach because it is seen as bending the Quranic text to suit the exegete's preferences rather than following proper exegetical methods. According to az-Ẓahabī, this is what causes Shi'ite exegesis to deviate from the proper principles and methods of interpretation. For example, the interpretation of Surah al-Hijr, verse 36,

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قَالَ رَبِّ فَأَنْظِرْنِي إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

Meaning: *He said, "My Lord, then reprieve me until the Day they are resurrected."* (QS. Al-Hijr: 36)

The phrase "*Yaum al-Yub'asūn*" in this verse is interpreted by the Shia as the day of the resurrection and the sending of Imam al-Mahdi, in contrast to the interpretation of the majority of Sunni scholars, who understand this verse as referring to the Day of Judgment when all creatures will be resurrected (Az-Dzahabi, 2004).

This interpretation highlights a significant difference in the understanding of eschatology between the Shia and the Sunnis. However, not all Shia exegetical works are extreme in nature. There are also moderate Shia exegeses, such as *al-Burhān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* by at-Ṭabarsī and *al-Mīzān* by at-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, which cite not only the opinions of Shia scholars but also those of Sunni scholars. In terms of interpretations unrelated to Shi'ite doctrines, such as *Imāmah* and *Wilayāh*, Shi'ite interpretations do not differ significantly from Sunni interpretations.

In the Shia tradition, there are many schools of interpretation, one of which is the Sufi interpretation, which plays an important role because it is believed to be able to adapt the meaning of the verses of the Quran to the context and address issues arising in society. They believe that the Sufi interpretation of the verses of the Quran remains relevant and applicable across various contexts and eras; thus, they strive to uncover deeper Sufi meanings within the verses of the Quran to meet the spiritual needs of their community (Anwar, 2010).

Sufi interpretation is one approach to delving into the implied meanings of the Quranic verses. In line with its main characteristic which places greater emphasis on *ḥaqq* (intuition) and *esoteric* (spiritual, inner) aspects Sufi exegesis possesses distinct characteristics compared to other styles of exegesis, as it employs a different approach to interpreting verses. Sufi exegesis is sometimes also referred to as *ta'wil*, as it often reveals the hidden and profound secrets lying beneath the literal text (Khotimah, 2017).

Why have Sufi interpretations of Quranic verses emerged? Because the Quran offers a broad scope for exploring its meanings and contains hidden divine messages. To uncover the hidden meanings behind the text of these Quranic verses, a deep and rational Sufi interpretation is required (Muhaimin & Munawaroh, 2019). According to Al-Qusyairī and Abū Naṣar as-Sirraj, a person's ability to understand the hidden meanings behind the text of the Quranic verses depends on the degree and quality of their spirituality or their closeness to Allah SWT. Thus, Sufi interpretation has different levels, corresponding to the Nūr that Allah radiates within their *Qalbu*, their *maqam* (position in God's sight), and *al-Wiḥd* (God's grace).

Thus, the Sufis' understanding of the verses of the Quran has different essences and levels of interpretation from one another, even though they employ the same approach in interpreting the verses. Ibn Atha' al-Adamī (d. 309 AH/922 CE) emphasized that the Sufi meaning of the Quran can only be attained by those who have purified their hearts and innermost selves. This is achieved through the process of *riyāḍah ruḥiyyah* (spiritual discipline) under the guidance of a mursyid. When a salik has become 'Arif (acquainted) with Allah, He will bestow upon him the knowledge of His *sirr laduni* or *kasyf*. Therefore, Imam Ja'sfar as-Ṣādiq stated that the kitab of Allah SWT encompasses four matters: *ibarat*, *isyarat*, *laṭā'if*, and *haqaiq*. *Ibarat* is for the layperson, *isyarat* is for the initiated, *laṭā'if* is for the saints of Allah, and *haqaiq* is for the Prophets. The emergence of the Sufi style of exegesis is evidence that Muslims continue to engage in *tajdid al-'ilm* (the renewal of knowledge) in response to the relationship between the Word of Allah and the social context of their time. For the Quran is guidance for humanity.

To speak of human beings is to speak of the most perfect creatures on this earth. Human beings are the most exceptional creatures compared to all others. They possess an advantage that none of Allah's other creations have: the gift of reason and both internal and external awareness bestowed upon them by the Creator, Allah SWT. Endowed with reason, humans can develop their talents and potential and are capable of governing and managing the universe as a trust. However, in addition to possessing great potential, the Quran also explains that humans have desires that can lead them to make mistakes, which can have negative consequences for themselves and those around them. Allah SWT states in Surah Yusuf, verse 53,

وَمَا أُبْرِئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

Meaning: *And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful.*" (QS. Yusuf: 53)

This verse continues the words of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him): "Indeed, I have never betrayed my Lord, even when I was alone." The words of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him). The phrase *وَمَا أُبْرِئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي* "I do not (declare) myself free (from sin)" is a sign of Prophet Yusuf's humility; he did not claim to possess any strength or ability within himself, even though Prophet Yusuf (AS) was among those servants whose hearts Allah had purified of everything other than Allah, and Prophet Yusuf (AS) was also among those whose monotheism (*tawhid*) toward Allah was profound. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī:201).

The statement above is reinforced by His words, *وَمَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي* "except for the soul to which my Lord has shown mercy." This sentence carries two meanings: First, it qualifies the statement "Indeed, the soul is strongly inclined toward evil." This means that when a person does good, it is possible because of the mercy of Allah SWT; it stems from one's own will, as one has been granted mercy by Allah, and is not something that happens by force or is compelled by Allah SWT. Second: It is an indication that Prophet Yusuf's salvation from betraying Allah (committing sin) was solely due to the mercy of Allah SWT. Furthermore, "Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful." There is something interesting in the structure of this verse: Allah pairs the word "forgiveness" with His mercy. Why is that? Because al-Maghfirah or forgiveness covers all the shortcomings inherent in oneself, whereas mercy reveals beautiful or good things. Allah's forgiveness not only erases sins and their traces but also covers all shortcomings, flaws, and the consequences of those sins. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī:201).

According to Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the structure of the text of Surah Yusuf, verse 53, contains many allusions to the sublime and profound meanings of *tawhid*. Among the subtleties of its meaning is the word *رَبِّي*, which is repeated three times in this surah once in verse 50 and twice in verse 53,

إِنَّ رَبِّي بِكَيْدِهِمْ عَلِيمٌ ٥٠ إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ٥٣

Meaning: *Indeed, my Lord is Knowing of their plan. And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful.*" (QS. Yusuf 50 & 53)

Because these sentences contain expressions of the blessings from Allah SWT related to Prophet Yusuf AS. Therefore, Prophet Yusuf (AS) praised Allah SWT, attributing these blessings to Himself, so that his message of *da'wah* namely, *Tawhid* might be conveyed, by establishing Allah SWT as the Lord whom he (Prophet Yusuf AS) worships, and to distinguish himself from those who worship gods other than Allah (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1997).

From Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation above, no ideological bias is found; in fact,

Ṭabāṭabā'ī reveals the Sufi meaning in this verse by noting that the structure of the text in Surah Yusuf, verse 53, contains profound values of *Tawhid*. In this study, the author will discuss Ṭabāṭabā'ī's Sufi interpretation of the verses regarding the levels of the nafs in Tafsīr al-Mīzan. Why Tafsīr al-Mīzan? Because Tafsīr al-Mīzan is one of the most influential works of exegesis in the tradition of Islamic thought, particularly among Shia thinkers (Achmad, 2021).

One of the main characteristics of this exegesis is its in-depth philosophical approach. Ṭabāṭabā'ī not only explains the literal meaning of the Quranic verses but also explores the philosophical (*Sufi*) and theological dimensions contained within them (Kurniawan & Khairunnisa, 2021). According to Mohammad Ali Mahdavidad in his journal article titled "A Comparative Study of 'Allamah Thabataba'i and Al Manar Commentators on Verse 31 of Sura An-Nisa' in Relation to the Avoidance of Al-Kaba'ir," Ṭabāṭabā'ī sought to connect the teachings of the Quran with universal philosophical principles, so that his exegesis is relevant not only to Muslims but also to thinkers from various backgrounds (Mahdavidad et al., 2022).

Another characteristic of *Tafsīr al-Mīzan* is its use of a critical analytical method that combines Tafsīr bi al-Ma'shur (exegesis based on tradition) and Tafsīr bi ar-Ra'y (exegesis based on reason). Ṭabāṭabā'ī also emphasizes the importance of historical and linguistic concepts in understanding the verses of the Quran (Karimah & Gunawan, 2022). In Tafsīr al-Mīzan, Ṭabāṭabā'ī frequently refers to traditions from the Ahl al-Bayt and the Prophet's companions to provide a richer context for the verses being interpreted. This approach enables readers to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the verses' meanings (Otta, 2018). Furthermore, Tafsīr al-Mīzan is also known for its ability to address contemporary issues (Setiawan 2024). Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not focus solely on theological aspects but also addresses the social and cultural challenges faced by Muslims in his time. Ṭabāṭabā'ī sought to address questions arising in modern society, such as issues of gender, human rights, and interfaith relations. This demonstrates that Tafsīr al-Mīzan is not merely static but also dynamic and relevant to the changing times (Tamrin, 2019).

Another important characteristic of Tafsīr al-Mīzan is Ṭabāṭabā'ī's systematic and structured writing style. He organizes his exegesis in a way that makes it easy for readers to follow his line of reasoning (Wahid & Ibrahim, 2023). Ṭabāṭabā'ī uses clear and straightforward language and includes various references to support his arguments. This writing style not only makes his exegesis easy to understand but also appealing to readers who wish to study the Quran more seriously. With these characteristics, Tafsīr al-Mīzan has become one of the primary references in the study of exegesis and contemporary Islamic thought (Fauzan, 2018).

However, despite the many strengths of Tafsīr al-Mīzan a contemporary Shia exegesis it remains a hot topic of discussion among exegetes. Al-Zahabī asserts that the emergence of Tafsīr al-Mīzan marked a turning point toward moderation in Shia exegesis. However, this view warrants further critical examination (Musolli, 2015). Al-Mīzan, a work by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, received a positive reception from scholars of his time. Among the Shia community itself, the exegesis was highly appreciated upon its release. All circles also appreciated the exegete's moderation. Take Sheikh Mahmud Shaltut, for example, a professor at al-Azhar who also admired the work of Tabataba'i's predecessor, namely Tafsīr Tabrisi. Unlike the tendencies of classical Shi'ite exegesis, the opposite is true of modern Shi'ite exegeses, such as al-Mīzan. Sectarian tendencies do not significantly shape the content of Shi'ite exegesis.

METHODS

In this study, the author employs a literature review method that is, research based on data collection from scientific literature, books, or journals relevant to the

topic under discussion. The analysis of these verses employs a qualitative-descriptive approach, as it focuses on a deep understanding of the meaning of the Quranic text specifically Surah Yusuf, verse 53; Surah Al-Kahfi, verse 28; and Surah Al-Qiyamah, verse 2 in relation to carnal desires. The data sources in this study are the subjects from which the data were obtained; these sources can be classified into two major groups: primary data and secondary data. The primary data source in this study is the kitab *Tafsir al-Mizan* by Muhammad Husayn Thaba'thaba'i. Additionally, the Quranic verses: Surah Yusuf, verse 53; Surah Al-Kahf verse 28, and Surah Al-Qiyamah verse 2, which relate to carnal desires. The secondary data sources include several collections of *Ulum al-Quran* or books discussing Sufism, as well as theses, dissertations, and journals related to Muhammad Husein Thaba'thaba'i's *Tafsir al-Mizan*.

Research data was collected by gathering and analyzing data related to carnal desires from literature relevant to the theme "Sufi Interpretation of Verses on Carnal Desires in Thaba'thaba'i's *Tafsir Al-Mizan*." This data collection technique was carried out through documentation, namely by gathering verses related to the title whether in the form of kitab, scientific journals, theses, or dissertations and cataloging all reading materials related to the subject of study (Efendi et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2026). The method the author used to analyze the data collected from primary and secondary sources was content analysis, which involves an in-depth examination of the text to uncover the important meanings hidden within it. The data analysis process involves sorting, comparing, examining, and categorizing various interpretations to identify valid and relevant data. Thus, in this context, the passages to be analyzed are Surah Yusuf, verse 53; Surah Al-Kahf, verse 74; Surah Al-Qiyamah, verse 2; and Surah Al-Fajr, verse 74. In addition, the author also conducted an analysis referencing Sufi texts to confirm the Sufi values contained in *Tafsir al-Mizan*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sufi Interpretation of the Verses on the Stages of the Nafs in *Tafsir al-Mizan*

First is the *Nafs Ammarah Bi as-Su'*

وَمَا أَبْرَأُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

Meaning: *And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful.*" (QS. Yusuf : 53)

This verse continues the words of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him): "Indeed, I have never betrayed my Lord, even when I was alone." The words of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him). The phrase *وَمَا أَبْرَأُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ* "I do not (declare) myself free (from sin)" is a sign of Prophet Yusuf's humility; he did not claim to possess any strength or ability within himself, even though Prophet Yusuf (AS) was among those servants whose hearts Allah had purified of everything other than Allah, and Prophet Yusuf (AS) was also among those whose monotheism (*tawhid*) toward Allah was profound. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī:201)

Thus, Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) quickly denied the existence of any power or strength within himself, and attributed all the good deeds and praiseworthy qualities evident in him solely to the mercy of Allah, the Exalted and Glorious. Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) also equated himself with all human beings, who generally, by instinct, are inclined toward the *Nafsu 'Ammarah bi as-Su'*. Thus, Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) said,

وَمَا أَبْرَأُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي

This statement by Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) is similar to the one made

by Prophet Shu‘ayb (peace be upon him). Allah has recorded it in Surah Hud, verse 88,
 قَالَ يَقَوْمِ اَرَأَيْتُمْ اِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّي وَرَزَقَنِي مِنْهُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا وَمَا اُرِيدُ اَنْ اُخَالِفْكُمْ اِلٰى مَا اَهْكُمُ عَنْهُ لَنْ اُرِيدُ
 اِلَّا الْاِصْلَاحَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي اِلَّا بِاللّٰهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَاِلَيْهِ اُنِيبُ

Meaning: He (Shu‘ayb) said, “O my people, state your case if I have clear proof from my Lord and He has granted me good provision (is it right for me to disobey His command?). I (truly) do not wish to differ from you (and then do) what I myself forbid. I only intend to bring about reform to the best of my ability. I have no power to bring about reform except through Allah’s help. In Him I place my trust, and to Him I return.”

The phrase وَمَا اُبْرِيْ نَفْسِيْ “I do not absolve myself” was uttered by Prophet Joseph not to exonerate or praise himself, but solely to recount the mercy that Allah had bestowed upon him. As for the true meaning that the *nafs* constantly urges one to do evil, it is that, by its very nature, the *nafs* indeed inclines one toward all manner of evil desires, which are limitless in number. (Ṭabāṭabā’ī:201).

It is therefore foolish for anyone to consider themselves free from the inclination toward evil, because fundamentally, within them lies a *nafs* whose very nature is to incline toward evil. To prevent the *nafs* from inclining toward evil, one requires the mercy and guidance of Allah SWT, so that Allah may turn it away from the inclination to do evil and toward the inclination to do good deeds. (Ṭabāṭabā’ī:201).

The statement above is reinforced by His words, اِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي, “except for the soul to which my Lord has shown mercy.” This sentence carries two meanings: First, it qualifies the statement “Indeed, the soul is strongly inclined toward evil” This means that when a person does good, it is possible because of the mercy of Allah SWT; it stems from one’s own will, as one has been granted mercy by Allah, and is not something that occurs by force or is compelled by Allah SWT. Second: It is an indication that Prophet Yusuf’s salvation from betraying Allah (committing sin) was solely due to the mercy of Allah SWT (Ṭabāṭabā’ī:201).

Furthermore, اِنَّ رَبِّيْ غَفُوْرٌ رَّحِيْمٌ “Indeed, my Lord is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful.” There is something interesting about the structure of this verse: Allah pairs the word “forgiveness” with His mercy. Why is that? Because al-Maghfirah or forgiveness covers all the shortcomings inherent in oneself, whereas mercy reveals beautiful or good things. Allah SWT’s forgiveness not only erases sins and their traces but also covers all shortcomings, flaws, and the consequences of those sins. (Ṭabāṭabā’ī:201).

Allah SWT says in Surah al-An‘am 145,

قُلْ لَا اَجِدُ فِيْ مَا اُوْحِيَ اِلَيَّ مُحَرَّمًا عَلَىٰ طَاعِمٍ يَّتَعَمَّهُ اِلَّا اَنْ يَكُوْنَ مَيْتَةً اَوْ دَمًا مَّسْفُوْحًا اَوْ لَحْمَ خِنْزِيْرٍ فَاِنَّهٗ رَجْسٌ اَوْ فِسْقًا اِهْلًا لِّغَيْرِ اللّٰهِ بِهٖ فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَاِنَّ رَبَّكَ غَفُوْرٌ رَّحِيْمٌ ١٤٥

Meaning: Say, “I find nothing in what has been revealed to me that forbids eating it for those who wish to eat it, except for the meat of animals that have died of natural causes (carrion), blood that has been spilled, pork for it is impure or animals slaughtered in a manner that is sinful, (that is,) by invoking the name of anyone other than Allah. However, whoever is compelled to do so not out of desire and without exceeding the limits of necessity then indeed, your Lord is Forgiving and Merciful.”

The connection between this verse and the previous one is that Allah SWT juxtaposes the concepts of His forgiveness and His mercy. This verse describes the types of food that are forbidden to eat for specific reasons. Although they are forbidden, Allah grants an exception to those who are compelled to eat them due to an emergency. Allah demonstrates His attributes of forgiveness and compassion toward His servants. Consuming what is forbidden is a violation of what Allah has decreed; however, for those who are compelled to eat it, it is not counted as a sin or a personal failing. That is the secret within these two verses why Allah juxtaposes the word *al-*

Maghfirah with mercy.

According to Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the structure of the text in Surah Yusuf, verse 53, contains many allusions to the sublime and profound meanings of Tawhid. Among the subtleties of its meaning is the word رَبِّي, which is repeated three times in this surah once in verse 50 and twice in verse 53,

إِنَّ رَبِّي بِكَذِبِهِمْ عَلِيمٌ ٥٠ إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ٥٣

Since these verses contain expressions of blessings from Allah SWT related to Prophet Yusuf AS, Prophet Yusuf AS praised Allah SWT by attributing them to himself, so that his message of Tawhid affirming that Allah SWT is the only God worthy of worship might be conveyed, and to distinguish himself from those who worship gods other than Allah (Ṭabāṭabā'ī:202).

From Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation above, it can be understood that, fundamentally, all human desires generally incline toward evil, except for those desires that have been granted the grace of protection from Allah SWT. This statement is consistent with what was expressed by Shaykh Abdul Qadīr Jīlānī and Al-Alūsī in their exegeses. According to Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, by nature, the *nafs* always urges humans to disobey their Lord and takes pleasure in causing corruption. Therefore, in this verse, Prophet Yusuf acknowledges his own weakness and states that he is not immune to the temptations of the *nafs*, for the very nature of the *nafs* is to lead astray. The *nafs* will cease to mislead its owner once it has received mercy and protection from Allah SWT, meaning that the *nafs* has ascended to a level safe from disobedience toward Allah.

Al-Alūsī, in his Tafsīr Rūh al-Ma'ānī, states that all desires urge one to commit evil, except for those desires that Allah has blessed with His protection, such as that of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him). The lowest-ranking soul will certainly always incite disobedience; however, unlike the soul protected by Allah SWT, al-Alūsī does not specifically mention the name of the soul granted protection by Allah SWT, just as Ṭabāṭabā'ī did previously. To reinforce the above interpretation, al-Alūsī cites the opinions of Sufis who state that the *Nafsu 'Ammarah bi as-Sū'* is the soul that is constantly inclined toward physical pleasures and carnal desires, drawing the heart into the valley of degradation the abode of evil and the source of reprehensible moral traits.

This differs slightly from what Fakhruddin ar-Razī stated. When he quoted the opinion of the mystics (*Sufis*), who said that in truth the human soul is but one, yet that soul possesses many characteristics and depends on a servant's choice: if he directs it toward obedience or inclines it toward what pleases his Lord, then his soul becomes the *Muṭamainnah*; if he indulges his desires, is prone to anger, or commits evil deeds, then his soul becomes the '*Ammarah bi as-Sū'*'. However, according to Fakhruddin ar-Razī himself, the '*Ammarah bi as-Sū'*' is the soul that constantly inclines toward evil and takes pleasure in sin.

From the Sufi view put forward by Fakhruddin ar-Razī, it emerges that a servant plays a significant role in determining his or her choices, in contrast to the views expressed by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Shaykh Abdul Qadīr Jīlānī, and Al-Alūsī, who maintain that the key to being freed from the shackles of the '*Ammarah bi as-Sū'*' is to receive the mercy of Allah SWT. Nevertheless, these exegetes agree that the '*Ammarah bi as-Sū'*' is an evil and misleading desire.

Second is the *Lanwamah*

وَلَا أَقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ ٢

Meaning: *And I swear by the reproaching soul [to the certainty of resurrection].* (QS. Al-Qiyamah: 2)

Nafsu al-Lanwamah is the soul of a believer who feels remorse in this world for committing sins and finds it difficult to perform acts of obedience. There is also an

opinion that *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* refers to the human soul in general, whether that of a righteous believer or a disobedient disbeliever. On the Day of Judgment, a believer who possesses *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* will reproach himself for having performed very few acts of obedience and not having done much good. As for the disbeliever, he will reproach himself for his disbelief and disobedience while in this world.

Thus, according to this view, *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* exists in both believers and disbelievers. There is another view that states that *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* is possessed only by disbelievers; on the Day of Judgment, they will reproach themselves for their disbelief and sins committed in this world. Allah, the Exalted, says,

وَلَوْ أَنَّ لِلْكَافِرِ نَفْسٍ ظَلَمَتْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ لَافْتَدَتْ بِهِ وَأَسْرَوْا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَتُصْحَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ٥٤

Meaning: *And if each soul that wronged had everything on earth, it would offer it in ransom. And they will confide regret when they see the punishment; and they will be judged in justice, and they will not be wronged* (QS. Yunus: 54)

Each opinion I (Ṭabāṭabā'ī) have expressed has its own basis and rationale. Based on the opinions of the scholars cited by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, there are several categories of people who possess the *Nafsu al-Lawwamah*, namely: First, believers who commit sins, find it very difficult to obey Allah, and do not perform many good deeds while in this world; therefore, they constantly reproach themselves both in this world and in the Hereafter. Second, disbelievers who do not acknowledge any god besides Allah; in this world and the hereafter, they will reproach themselves for their disbelief.

Meanwhile, in the exegetical work *Rūḥ al-Ma'anī*, al-Alūsī cites several narrations, including those from 'Abd ibn Humāid and Ibn Jarīr from Qatadah, who said, "*Nafsu al-Lawwamah* is the rebellious, greedy soul that reproaches its owner for what he has done in this world." A similar interpretation is also found in a narration from Ibn 'Abbas. However, according to al-Alūsī, this view is not entirely accurate. Therefore, what is meant by *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* is the soul of a pious person who reproaches himself on the Day of Judgment for not having shown sufficient piety toward Allah SWT.

In addition to the account above, al-Alūsī also cites other opinions, such as that of *Mujāhid*, who stated that the *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* is the soul that reproaches itself for what has passed and regrets having committed evil deeds while also regretting having done so few good deeds. Thus, this soul is constantly in a state of regret, even though it has been earnest in performing acts of obedience. Al-Alūsī also cites the view that the *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* is the soul that encompasses all people, both the pious and the disobedient. This is based on a narration from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which states that on the Day of Judgment, there will not be a single *nafs* that does not reproach itself whether it be the obedient or the disobedient. Why is this so? Because on the Day of Judgment, those who have done good deeds will say, "*Why didn't I do more?*" while those who have committed evil deeds will say, "*Why didn't I do less?*"

According to most Sufis, *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* is the second level after *Nafsu 'Ammarah bi as-Sū'* and below *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah*. They say that *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* has actually received *Nūr*, or light, from the *Qolbu*, but that light only lingers briefly namely, when it realizes it has committed a lapse. Thus, whenever evil arises from within it, it begins to reproach itself for having fallen into that lapse. Thus, the *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* still leans toward darkness, sometimes obeying and sometimes disobeying. Therefore, the *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* occupies an intermediate level between the *Nafsu 'Ammarah bi as-Sū'* and the *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah*. It can also be described as an unstable soul (Al-Alūsī:151–152)

The views of these Sufis reinforce what Ṭabāṭabā'ī had previously interpreted, namely that the characteristics of *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* include continuing to commit sins

while still feeling remorse and performing some acts of goodness or obedience to Allah. At first glance, Ṭabā'tabā'i's Sufi interpretation may not be apparent, but upon closer examination, its Sufi meaning can be found in the word "remorse." This remorse arises because there is still a little *Nūr* in the *Qolbu*, though its light is dim, causing one to still fall into sin, as stated by the Sufi scholars cited by Al-Alūsī. This view is further supported by the opinion of the great Sufi Sheikh Abdul Qādir Jīlānī, who said that remorse is a sign that the heart is still alive; as long as it is alive, there is hope of receiving His light. Regret is also a prerequisite for *Taubat an-Nasuha* (genuine repentance).

Explicitly, there is no fundamental difference between the interpretations of Ṭabā'tabā'i and al-Alūsī. This contrasts with *Sahl al-Tustarī*, who states that the *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* is the same as the *Nafsu 'Ammarah bi as-Sū'*. As for the characteristics of *Nafsu al-Lawwamah*, there are four: greed, excessive daydreaming, and being deceived by the world even though Allah has forbidden this in Surah Luqman, verse 33,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ وَاحْشَوْا يَوْمًا لَا يَجْزِي وَالِدٌ عَنْ وَلَدِهِ وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ هُوَ جَارٌ عَنْ وَالِدِهِ شَيْئًا إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغَرُورُ ۝ ٣٣

Meaning: *O mankind, fear your Lord and fear a Day when no father will avail his son, nor will a son avail his father at all. Indeed, the promise of Allah is truth, so let not the worldly life delude you and be not deceived about Allah by the Deceiver* (QS. Luqman: 33)

Next, deceived by their desires as Allah had previously warned in Surah Yusuf, verse 53,

وَمَا أُبَرِّئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ۝ ٥٣

Meaning: *And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful.*" (QS. Yusuf: 53) (*Sahl al-Tustarī*:182)

Thus, *Sahl al-Tustarī* does not distinguish between *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* and *Nafsu 'Ammarah bi as-Sū'*; in the realm of scholarly discourse, this distinction is valid, but the author leans more toward the opinion of Ṭabā'tabā'i and al-Alūsī, who distinguish between the two, because there is already a linguistic difference, and thus the meanings are certainly different as well. For this reason, the scholars distinguish between the two and classify *Nafsu 'Ammarah bi as-Sū'* as the lowest level of the *nafs* and *Nafsu al-Lawwamah* as the second level.

Third is *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah*

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ۝ ٢٧

Meaning: *[To the righteous it will be said], "O reassured soul,* (QS. al-Fajr: 27)

The Word of Allah SWT: "O tranquil soul" What is meant in this verse is a comparison between the *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah* with its noble qualities and the beautiful abode prepared for it and the human being mentioned earlier, who is characterized by love of the world (attachment to the world), disobedience or transgression, causing corruption, and disbelief, and who is threatened with a terrible abode (Ṭabā'tabā'i:323)

Thus, the *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah* is the soul that has found comfort in its Lord and is content with whatever He wills. Consequently, it views itself purely as a slave or servant who possesses absolutely no power over anything be it good, evil, benefit, or harm. It regards this worldly life as merely a temporary stopover, and everything it receives within it whether wealth or poverty, or all manner of benefits and harms is a test and trial from Allah (Ṭabā'tabā'i:323)

Therefore, the succession of blessings did not turn him into a disobedient person or one who overstepped boundaries, caused widespread destruction, or became arrogant and haughty. Conversely, the misfortunes of poverty and loss did not plunge him into disbelief or cause him to abandon gratitude. Rather, he becomes even more

steadfast in his position as an obedient servant and does not deviate from the straight path neither by going to extremes in worship nor by overstepping the bounds of negligence. This is the perfect character of a servant who possesses the *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah* (Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī:323)

When a servant has entered the category of the *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah*, he is entitled to the Pleasure (*Riḍa*) of Allah SWT, and will certainly be included among the servants whose servitude is perfected (*maqom al-'Ubūdiyyah*) and admitted into His Paradise, as the verse continues. Therefore, a servant who has attained *Muṭamainnah* toward his Lord will develop in his heart a sense of dependence on Allah SWT and contentment with the truth that comes from Him. And everything within him whether in the form of his actions, his attributes, or his very essence belongs solely to his Lord. Thus, he does not desire any decree from Allah, nor does he seek commands or prohibitions that are contrary to what Allah SWT desires. He fully conforms to what his Lord wills for him. These are the characteristics of the station of a servant whose servitude to his Lord is perfect (Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī:323)

When Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī interpreted this verse, he identified several characteristics of a servant whose soul has ascended to the level of *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah*, namely: not being attached to the world (love of the world), does not cause corruption, is obedient to Allah, finds comfort only in Allah, is content with the decree of Allah SWT, is grateful, is not arrogant, and manifests the station of servitude.

Do the characteristics mentioned by Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī align with the views of other exegetes? Specifically, Sunni exegetes. Al-Alusī states that *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah* is a soul whose light has been perfected by the Light of the Heart (*Nūr al-Qalb*), so that all bad traits have vanished from the Heart. When these bad traits are gone, praiseworthy character emerges, and the pinnacle of this is finding comfort in closeness to Allah SWT, for it is human nature to seek closeness to one's Lord.

Thus, the characteristics of the *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah* mentioned earlier by Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī are the fruit of the light of the heart that has been perfected, so that blameworthy traits disappear and praiseworthy traits emerge, such as detachment from the world, refraining from causing harm, humility, and so on. Thus, what Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī mentioned earlier is indeed true. In Sufi literature, this is commonly known through the theory proposed by al-Ghazālī: *Takhallī*, *Taballī*, and *Tajallī*. Therefore, the *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah* is a servant who has reached the level of *Tajallī*.

As for the method by which the nafs is illuminated by the light of the heart and reaches the level of *Nafsu al-Muṭamainnah*, there is no other way except through the practice of dhikr of Allah SWT (Fakhrud-dīn ar-Razī:161) Why is that? Because when a servant engages in remembrance, his heart is purified; once purified, light (*Nūr*) will surely emerge as a result of that remembrance. The heart can only be purified through remembrance, not by anything else, as stated by the Prophet Muhammad SAW,

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، أَنَّهُ كَانَ يَقُولُ: إِنَّ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ سِقَالَةً، وَإِنَّ سِقَالَةَ الْقُلُوبِ ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ، وَمَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ أُنْحَى مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ مِنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ. قَالُوا وَلَا الْجِهَادَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: وَلَوْ أَنْ تَضْرِبَ بِسَيْفِكَ حَتَّى يَنْقُطَ. (رواه البيهقي)

Meaning: From Abdullah ibn Umar, from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), that the Prophet would always say, "Indeed, for every thing there is a purifier." Thus, the purifier of the heart is the remembrance of Allah (dhikr); there is nothing more important for saving a person from the punishment of Allah than the remembrance of Allah. The Companions asked, "Even jihad in the way of Allah, O Messenger of Allah?" The Prophet replied, "Even if you strike with your sword until it shatters." (Narrated by Al-Baihaqi, No. 519)

Once the desires have been purified and good character has manifested within a servant through remembrance of Allah SWT, then according to Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī the

pinnacle is attaining a sense of peace and comfort found only in Allah SWT, and always desiring to be close to Him and no one else. This statement by Ṭabāṭṭabāʾī is found in the stories of Sufis who are intoxicated with love and always long to be close to their Lord, such as the story of a Sufi recounted in the kitab *Ahlul Hakikah Ma'a Allah* by Shaykh Ahmad Rifaʿī, the founder of the Rifaʿiyyah order.

Once, Abdul Bārī was traveling with his brother *Zun an-Nūn al-Miṣri*. Midway through the journey, we encountered a group of children pelting a man with stones. *Zun an-Nūn al-Miṣri* asked, "What are you doing to him?" They replied, "This is a madman; he claims he can see Allah." We approached him; he was a handsome young man who bore the signs of one who had attained gnosis of Allah. We greeted him and said, "Indeed, they say that you see Allah, the Exalted and Glorious." He replied, "Go away from here, O people who do not understand. If I were to lose Him (Allah, the Exalted and Glorious) even for the blink of an eye I would rather die." He then recited a poem, the meaning of which is:

"What a lover seeks from his Beloved is His love and compassion. A lover's longing for his Beloved is to be with Him." A heart that has attained *ma'rifat* of Him will surely see Him. A lover's delight in his Beloved is to always be close to Him. He is not truly a lover if he desires anyone else (other than Allah)." (Sheikh Ahmad Rifaʿī:10)

Such are the Sufis (the lovers of Allah), who have tasted the bliss of being close to their Lord, for the bliss found with Allah cannot be replaced by any other pleasure so much so that the words "*I would rather die than be far from my Lord*" flow from their lips. Thus, it is true what Ṭabāṭṭabāʾī said: that the highest level is to always desire closeness to Allah SWT, and to no one else.

Fourth is the *Nafsu Zakiyyah* (the pure soul)

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَامًا فَقَتَلَهُ قَالَ أَقْتَلْتَنِي نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُكْرًا - ٧٤

Meaning: *So they set out, until when they met a boy, al-Khidhr killed him. [Moses] said, "Have you killed a pure soul for other than [having killed] a soul? You have certainly done a deplorable thing."* (QS. Al-Kahf: 74)

Zakiyyah's soul is a soul free from all sin because she has not yet reached puberty, as indicated by the term "*gulaman*" (children). Therefore, Prophet Moses was puzzled as to why Prophet Khidir killed the child. After all, the child had never committed murder, which would have justified his killing as *qisas*. Under Islamic law, the condition for permitting the killing of a person is that he or she has previously committed murder against another person. Furthermore, the child was still a minor who had not yet reached maturity and could not possibly have committed a murder that would require him to be subject to *qisas*. The law of *qisas* applies only to those who are legally accountable (*mukallaf*). (Ṭabāṭṭabāʾī:341)

Fakhruddin ar-Razī highlights two differences in *qirāʾat* when interpreting this verse while explaining the word *zakiyyah*. Imams of *qirāʾat* such as Imam Nāfiʿ, Ibn Katsīr, and Abū ʿAmr recite the word *zakiyyah* with an added alif to the letter zay, so that the word becomes *zākiyyah*, whereas other imams of *qirāʾat* recite *zakiyyah* without the alif. According to Imam al-Kisāʾī, these two words are synonyms, both meaning "at-Ṭahirah" (pure). According to Abū ʿAmr, however, the two words have different meanings: the word "*zākiyyah*" with the added alif means "one who has not yet committed a sin," while "*zakiyyah*" means "one who has sinned but has since repented" (Fakhruddin ar-Razī:487).

Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani interprets this verse as the story of Prophet Moses and Prophet Khidir. Here, Prophet Khidir kills a handsome young boy who had not yet reached puberty or adulthood and had committed no crime. The boy was playing with other children when, suddenly, Prophet Khidir grabbed his head and slammed it against a wall, killing him. Witnessing this, Prophet Moses asked, "Why did you kill him? He was still pure, innocent, free from sin, and had committed no murder." At the

end of their meeting, Prophet Khidir explained all the events that occurred during his journey with Prophet Moses, one of which concerned the story of that innocent child (Abdul Qadir Jilani: 90).

Based on the explanations of all the exegetes above, these scholars agree that a child who has not yet reached adulthood is still pure or free from sin. This means that his soul is still protected by Allah SWT from committing evil deeds. Therefore, the “*Nafsu Zakiyyah*” (the pure soul) is among those souls blessed by Allah, in accordance with Surah Yusuf, verse 53, which states that there are souls protected by Allah from committing evil. This is further reinforced by the saying of the Prophet Muhammad SAW,

أَنَّ أَبَا هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «مَا مِنْ مَوْلُودٍ إِلَّا يُولَدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ، فَأَبَوَاهُ يُهَوِّدَانِهِ وَيُنَصِّرَانِهِ أَوْ يُمَجَّسِنَانِهِ، كَمَا تُنْتَجِ الْبَيْهَمَةُ بَيْهَمَةً جَمْعَاءَ، هَلْ تُحْسِنُونَ فِيهَا مِنْ جَدْعَاءِ {رواه البخاري}

Meaning: *No child is born except in a state of fitrah that is, in a state of purity. It is the parents who make the child a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian, just as livestock give birth to livestock in a perfect state. Do you see any defect in them?* (HR: Al-Bukhari: 1359) (Al-Bukhari: 95)

Another hadith also mentions that there are three groups whose sins are not recorded by the angels in the Book of Sins, one of which is young children who have not yet reached puberty or are still in a state of purity.

عَنْ عَلِيٍّ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: «رُفِعَ الْقَلَمُ عَنْ ثَلَاثَةٍ: عَنِ النَّائِمِ حَتَّى يَسْتَيْقِظَ، وَعَنِ الصَّبِيِّ حَتَّى يَحْتَلِمَ، وَعَنِ الْمَجْنُونِ حَتَّى يَغْتَلِ {رواه أبو داود}

Meaning: *From ‘Alī, from the Prophet (peace be upon him): “The pen is lifted from three people: from one who is asleep until he wakes up, from a child until he reaches puberty, and from a mad person until he regains his sanity.”* (Narrated by Abū Dawud, 4403) (Abū Dawud, 455)

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the Sufi interpretation of the verses on the levels of the *nafs* in Tafsir al-Mizān by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī presents an approach that balances textual, rational, and spiritual interpretations. Ṭabāṭabā’ī explains that a person’s spiritual journey proceeds through several stages of the *nafs*: the *nafs al-ammārah*, the *nafs al-lawwāmah*, the *nafs al-muṭma’innah*, and the *nafs al-ḥakīyyah*, each of which reflects the development of one’s spiritual qualities and closeness to Allah SWT. This interpretation emphasizes the importance of Allah’s mercy, the purification of the soul, repentance, remembrance of Allah, and the control of one’s desires as the path to spiritual perfection. The research findings also indicate that *Tafsir al-Mizān* does not exhibit a dominant ideological bias in interpreting verses about the soul, but rather highlights the universal values of Sufism, tawhid, and moral cultivation. Thus, this exegesis makes a significant contribution to the development of Sufi exegetical studies and serves as a relevant reference for understanding the spiritual dimensions of the Quran in the context of contemporary society.

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