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Letter 1

Thul Qi'da 6, 1329 A.H.

I. Greeting the Debater

1) Peace and Allah's mercy and blessings be upon the learned honourable Shaykh 'AbdulHusayn Sharafuddin AlMusawi.

I have not been acquainted yet with Shi'as' conscience, nor have I tested their manners, for I have never kept company with any of them, nor come to know the traditions of their folks. But I have always been eager to debate with their renowned scholars, anxious to mix with their commoners, in order to sift their trends and attempt to know their inclinations, until Allah helped me stand by the spacious shore of your ocean of knowledge, and you let me taste of your brimful cup; Allah helped me quench my thirst.

I swear by the city of Allah's knowledge, your Chosen Grandfather, and by its gate, your pleased ancestor, that I have never tasted anything so satisfying to the thirsty, and so curing to the sick, like your overflowing stream.

I used to hear that you, Shi'a folks, prefer to avoid your brethren, the Sunnis, and keep away from them, and that you find your ease in loneliness, resorting to isolation, and so on and so forth. But I have found your person to be gently charming, keen in debating, courteous, strong in argument, well humoured, honest in duel, appreciated in misunderstanding, cherished in competition; therefore, I have found the Shi'a a pleasant fragrance to sit with, and the quest of every man of letters.

II. Asking Permission to Debate

2) While standing by the shore of your tumultuous sea, I ask your permission to swim in it and dive deeply in pursuit of its jewels. If you grant me your permission, we will dig deeply for the root causes of particulars and obscurities which have long been agitating me; if not, it is entirely up to you. In raising my questions, I do not look for a fault or a defect, nor do I oppose, nor refute; instead, I have only one quest: searching for the truth. When truth is manifest, it then deserves to be followed; if not, I am only like one

(poet) who said:

We in what we have, and you in what you offer,

Are all satisfied, even when our views differ.

I will, if you permit me, confine my debate with you to two topics: one deals with the sect's Imamate, in its roots and branches,[1] and the other deals with the general Imamate, i.e. succession to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his progeny. My signature at the close of all my debates shall be "S," and let yours be "Sh." In advance, I solicit your forgiveness for every fault, and peace be with you.

Sincerely,

S

1. Having sought permission to debate, he starts explaining the debate's subject-matter, thus demonstrating his moral accomplishments and excellence as far as the norm of debate is concerned. The use of the initials "S" and "Sh" is an obviously suitable vehicle for carrying such a debate on, since "S" denotes his name "Salim" and his being a Sunni, while "Sh" signifies the author's surname "Sharafud-Din," and his being a Shi'a.

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