

Preface

Every Shi'i who seeks to debate a Sunni must insist on certain ten principles:

1. Both parties must swear before Allah to pursue, defend and follow the truth alone.
2. Both parties must agree on a specific topic, and also set the boundaries of the discussion.
3. Each party must declare beforehand what exactly must be proved by the other party in order to win the debate.
4. Each side must swear before Allah to strictly stay on the topic of the debate, and not deviate, digress or venture into any other throughout the discussion.
5. Each party must swear before Allah to present only authentically transmitted reports from both the Sunni books and the Shi'i books.
6. The Sunni party *must* always present reports with reliable chains from the Shi'i books only in order to convince the Shi'i on any point. In the same manner, the Shi'i must always present reports with reliable chains from the Sunni books in order to convince the Sunni on any point.
7. Authenticity of the reports is determined primarily through the chains of narration. Each party must either present the opinions of the relevant leading *rijal* experts on each *riwayah* or do a thorough *rijal* breakdown of its narrators using the strictest appropriate *rijal* standards. If either party has an objection to the authentication by the *'ulama* of any particular report, he must present convincing evidence to prove their error.
8. The opinions of scholars on issues are not valid as proof unless reliably transmitted evidence can be provided to back them up.
9. It is he who claims that something exists, or that it is true, that *must* provide the cogent evidence for it. The party denying it has no obligation to provide proof of his denial. However, where the claimer has provided his proof, the onus shifts to the denier. The denier must either accept the evidence supplied, or

provide solid academically sound and orthodox reasons to reject it.

10. There shall never be any vulgar abuse of the other party or anyone respected by his sect or *madhhab*. The debate shall be entirely decorous, and the choice of words shall be respectful.

Unfortunately, not many Sunnis or Shi'is have the necessary skills or temperaments to accept all the conditions stated above. Therefore, we almost always see very poor pseudo-debates, especially on online forums. We often see each side quoting *dha'if* reports from even his own sources, as well as from those of the opposing party, to drive home his weak points! In most cases, no original research is ever done on the topic by either side. Rather, each of them merely copy-pastes heavily from websites and parrots statements by others.

In the end, nothing useful is achieved from the debate. On a lot of occasions, the discussion turns into a cursing contest; and the party with the vilest tongue declares victory. It is our absolute conviction that whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing best. It is more advisable for pseudo-debaters to take time to train themselves in the necessary skills – academic and emotional – needed for a real debate before (re-)taking the podiums. The damage and evil caused by the pseudo-debates outweigh any benefits that might come from them.

Let us take the question of “Ibn Saba” as a case study for the ten rules above. Our brothers from the Ahl al-Sunnah always make the following claims about him:

1. He was a descendant of Saba, and belonged to one of the Sabai tribes.
2. He was a black Arab with a black slave mother.
3. He was a Jew from Sana in Yemen.
4. He accepted Islam during the *khilafah* of ‘Uthman b. ‘Affan.
5. He stirred up the public, especially the Egyptians, against ‘Uthman and caused the latter’s bloody overthrow.
6. He was the first to claim that ‘Ali, *‘alaihi al-salam*, was the designated successor of the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi*.
7. He was the first to proclaim belief in *al-raj’ah* – that is, that the return to this world after death by certain dead people.
8. He was the first to publicly criticize or revile Abu Bakr and ‘Umar.
9. He was popularly called *Ibn al-Sawda* – son of the black mother.
10. Imam ‘Ali was frustrated with him, and abused him by calling him “the black container” and also

banished him to al-Madain.

11. Amir al-Muminin 'Ali b. Abi Talib saw it as legitimate to execute him for reviling Abu Bakr and 'Umar, and would have done so had people not talked him out of the decision.

12. 'Ali burnt him (i.e. Ibn Saba) and his followers alive for calling him (i.e. 'Ali) Allah.

Since it is the Sunni in any debate who makes these claims, the onus is on him to provide reliably transmitted evidence for each and every point. The Shi'i – who denies them – has no initial obligation or responsibility to bring any evidence to refute them¹.

Normally, the question is: who exactly is the Sunni trying to convince on these matters? If he only seeks to convince his Sunni brothers, then he must present reliable *riwayat* from the *Sunni* books to back up all the points². However, if his aim is only to convince the Shi'ah, in that case he has no other choice but to quote nothing but authentic *Shi'i* reports in support of himself.

Incidentally, there are only three reliable *athar* concerning Ibn Saba throughout all Shi'i books. Shaykh 'Ali Al Muhsin has compiled the Shi'i *riwayat* about 'Abd Allah b. Saba, and examined their various chains³, and has thus concluded:

والصحيح من تلك الروايات منحصر بثلاث روايات مروية في رجال الكشي، وهي تثبت وجود عبد الله بن سبأ، وأنه ادعى الألوهية في أمير المؤمنين، فأحرقه بالنار، ولا تثبت أكثر من ذلك.

The authentic from these reports are only three reports recorded in *Rijal al-Kashi*, and they establish the existence of 'Abd Allah b. Saba, and that he claimed divinity for Amir al-Muminin, and that he ('Ali) therefore burnt him (i.e. Ibn Saba) with fire. **Nothing more than that is proved.⁴**

This is the first of the three reports, as quoted by Al Muhsin:

رواه الكشي أيضاً بسنده عن هشام بن سالم، قال: سمعت أبا عبد الله يقول وهو يحدث أصحابه بحديث عبد الله بن سبأ وما ادعى من الربوبية في أمير المؤمنين علي بن أبي طالب، فقال: إنه لما ادعى ذلك فيه استتابه أمير المؤمنين، فأبى أن يتوب فأحرقه بالنار.

Al-Kashi narrated it too with his chain from Hisham b. Salim, who said: I heard Abu 'Abd Allah saying, while addressing his companions on the issue of 'Abd Allah b. Saba and his claim of divinity for Amir al-Muminin, 'Ali b. Abi Talib: "When he made that claim concerning him, Amir al-Muminin asked him to repent. But, he refused to repent. So, he burnt him with fire."⁵

Al Muhsin also copies the second *hadith*:

رواه الكشي أيضاً في كتابه المذكور بسنده عن أبان بن عثمان, قال: سمعت أبا عبد الله يقول: لعن الله عبد الله بن سبأ, إنه ادعى الربوبية في أمير المؤمنين, وكان والله أمير المؤمنين عبداً لله طائعاً, الويل لمن كذب علينا, وإن قوماً يقولون فينا ما لا نقوله في أنفسنا, نبرأ إلى الله منهم, نبرأ إلى الله منهم.

Al-Kashi records again in his mentioned book with his chain from Aban b. ‘Uthman, who said: I heard Abu ‘Abd Allah saying: “**May Allah curse ‘Abd Allah b. Saba.** Verily, he claimed divinity for Amir al-Muminin. I swear by Allah, Amir al-Muminin was only an obedient slave of Allah. Woe unto whosoever lies upon us. A group say concerning us what we never say about ourselves, we dissociate ourselves from them unto Allah. We dissociate ourselves from them unto Allah.”[6](#)

And this is the third report, cited by Shaykh Al Muhsin:

رواه أيضاً بسنده عن أبي حمزة الثمالي, قال: قال علي بن الحسين: لعن الله من كذب علينا, إني ذكرت عبد الله بن سبأ فقامت كل شعرة في جسدي, لقد ادعى أمراً عظيماً, ما له لعنه الله! كان علي والله عبداً لله صالحاً, أخو رسول الله, ما نال الكرامة من الله إلا بطاعته لله ولرسوله, وما نال رسول الله الكرامة من الله إلا بطاعته.

He narrated again with his chain from Abu Hamzah al-Thumali, who said:

‘Ali b. al-Husayn said: “May Allah curse whosoever lies upon us. I remember ‘Abd Allah b. Saba, and every hair on my body rises. He made a terrible claim. What was wrong with him? **May Allah curse him.** I swear by Allah, ‘Ali was only a righteous slave of Allah and the brother of the Messenger of Allah. He did not achieve honour from Allah except through his obedience to Allah and to His Messenger. The Messenger of Allah too did not achieve honour from Allah except with his obedience of Him.”[7](#)

Then, Al Muhsin comments about the three *ahadith*:

وهذه الروايات الثلاث صحيحة السند

These three reports have *sahih* chains.[8](#)

Any Sunni who wants to debate any Shi’i on the topic of ‘Abd Allah b. Saba, *la’natullah ‘alaihi*, can therefore only quote the three *riwayat* above if he is sincere. However, he would NEVER be able to establish the Sunni claims below, through those authentic Shi’i *ahadith*:

1. ‘Abd Allah b. Saba was a black Arab with a black mother.
2. He was a Jew from Sana in Yemen.
3. He accepted Islam during the *khilafah* of ‘Uthman b. ‘Affan.

4. He stirred up the public, especially the Egyptians, against ‘Uthman and caused the latter’s bloody overthrow.
5. He was the first to claim that ‘Ali was the designated successor of the Messenger of Allah.
6. He was the first to proclaim belief in *al-raj’ah* – that is, that the Prophet will one day return to this world after death.
7. He was the first to publicly criticize or revile Abu Bakr and ‘Umar.
8. He was popularly called *Ibn al-Sawda* – son of *the* black mother.
9. Imam ‘Ali was frustrated with him, and abused him racially by calling him “the black container” and also banished him to al-Madain.
10. Amir al-Muminin ‘Ali b. Abi Talib saw it as legitimate to execute him for reviling Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, and would have done so had people not talked him out of the decision.

Therefore, our brothers from the Ahl al-Sunnah will *always* lose any debate on Ibn Saba with any Shi’i as long as both sides are honest.

Meanwhile, what about the Sunni sources? What if a Sunni only intended to convince another Sunni concerning ‘Abd Allah b. Saba? Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) outlines the necessary rules here:

و الجواب من وجوه أحدها انه لا بد من إقامة الدليل على صحة المنقول إلا فالاستدلال بما لا تثبت

The reply is from several angles. One of them is: **evidence *must* be presented for the authenticity of whatever is quoted.** Unless this is done, using it as proof is invalid.[9](#)

Elsewhere, in rejecting a report, he adds:

فيقال أولا هذه الحكاية لم يذكر لها إسنادا فلا تعرف صحتها فإن المنقولات إنما تعرف صحتها بالأسانيد الثابتة

It is said (in reply) that first and foremost, he has not mentioned any chain for this narration. Therefore, its authenticity is unknown. **This is because the authenticity of quoted reports is known only through their authentic chains.** [10](#)

He further reiterates:

ومعلوم أن من احتج في أي مسألة كانت بشيء من النقل فلا بد أن يذكر إسنادا تقوم به الحجة

It is well-known that whosoever relies upon as proof any narration in any issue, **he must mention (at least) a chain which establishes it as a *hujjah* (proof).**[11](#)

So, every Sunni must do the following with every report he mentions on ‘Abd Allah b. Saba:

1. Quote the report *with the full chain*.
2. Provide clear evidence for the reliability of the chain.

Interestingly, our dear Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah himself has failed completely to comply with either of the two obligatory rules in his discourses about Ibn Saba. For instance, this is his submission about how that controversial, “elusive” character mounted onto the Islamic scene:

وأما بيعة عثمان فلم يتخلف عنها أحد مع كثرة المسلمين وانتشرهم من إفريقية إلى خراسان ومن سواحل الشام إلى أقصى اليمن ومع كونهم كانوا ظاهرين على عدوهم من المشركين وأهل الكتاب يقاتلونهم وهي في زيادة فتح وانتصار ودوام دولة ودوام المسلمين على مبايعته والرضا عنه ست سنين نصف خلافته معظمين له مادحين له لا يظهر من أحد منهم التكلم فيه بسوء

ثم بعد هذا صار يتكلم فيه بعضهم وجمهورهم لا يتكلم فيه إلا بخير وكانت قد طالت عليهم إمارته فإنه بقي اننتي عشرة سنة لم تدم خلافة أحد من الأربعة ما دامت خلافته فإن خلافة الصديق كانت سنتين وبعض الثالثة وخلافة عمر عشر سنين وبعض الأخرى وخلافة على أربع سنين وبعض الخامسة ونشأ في خلافته من دخل في الإسلام كرها فكان منافقا مثل ابن سبأ وأمثاله وهم الذين سعوا في الفتنة بقتله

As for the *bay’ah* of ‘Uthman, there was no one who did not pledge it despite the great number of the Muslims and their spread from Africa to Khurasan (in Iran, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan), and from the plains of Syria to the remotest places of Yemen. This was also despite their victories over their enemies, such as the idolaters and the *Ahl al-Kitab* who fought them. This was accompanied by conquests and the survival of the state and the survival of the Muslims; and they (i.e. the Muslims) followed him and were pleased with him for six years – which was half of the period of his *khilafah*. They showed great respect to him, and praised him. There was not a single one of them who criticized him.

Then, after this, appeared those who criticized him. Yet, the majority of them did not talk about him except in good terms. However, his rule had gotten too long for them, for it lasted twelve years. The *khilafah* of none of the four (rightly guided *khalifahs*) lasted as long as his *khilafah*. The *khilafah* of al-Siddiq was for just a little over two years; the *khilafah* of ‘Umar lasted a little over ten years; and the *khilafah* of ‘Ali was for a little over four years. **During his (‘Uthman’s) *khilafah*, there were those who entered Islam unwillingly, and they were hypocrites, such as Ibn Saba and his likes, and they were those who started the *fitnah* (crisis) by killing him.**[12](#)

Really? ‘Abd Allah b. Saba “unwillingly” accepted Islam and, within a short period, successfully

masterminded the assassination and overthrow of the mighty *khalifah*?! Is there *any* reliable evidence for this? Well, our Shaykh makes no attempt to pretend that there is any! He has neither quoted any *riwayah* with any *sanad*, nor has he provided any evidence whatsoever for the authenticity of any report on his claims.

All right then, is there anything else we should know about ‘Abd Allah b. Saba? Our Shaykh says “yes”:

ولا ريب أن كثيراً ممن يحب الرسول من بني هاشم وغيرهم وقد تشيع قد تلقى من الرافضة ما هو من أعظم الأمور قدحا في الرسول فإن أصل الرفض إنما أحدثه زنديق غرضه إبطال دين الإسلام والقبح في رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم كما قد ذكر ذلك العلماء وكان عبد الله بن سبأ شيخ الرافضة لما أظهر الإسلام أراد أن يفسد الإسلام بمكره وخبثه كما فعل بولص بدين النصارى

There is no doubt that a lot of those who loved the Messenger among the Banu Hashim and others – and who also became Shi’ah – imbibed from the Rafidhah some of the most blasphemous matters concerning the Messenger. **This is because *al-rafidh* was founded by an infidel, whose aim was to destroy the religion of Islam, and to blaspheme the Messenger of Allah**, peace be upon him, as mentioned by the scholars. ‘Abd Allah b. Saba – the *shaykh* of the Rafidhah – when he professed Islam, he intended to corrupt Islam with his plots and malice, as Paul did with Christianity. [13](#)

Interestingly, once again, our Shaykh fails to provide *any* proof whatsoever for his claims!

So, what exactly did ‘Abd Allah b. Saba do to found Shi’ism? Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah thinks he has a clue on that as well:

قد علم أهل العلم أن أول ما ظهرت الشيعة الإمامية المدعية للنص في أواخر أيام الخلفاء الراشدين وأفتى ذلك عبدالله بن سبأ وطائفة الكذابون فلم يكونوا موجودين قبل ذلك

The scholars have known that the Shi’ah Imamiyyah, who claimed the *nass* (for ‘Ali), first appeared during the last periods of the rule of the *khulafa al-rashidin* (i.e. the rightly guided *khalifahs*). **That was invented by ‘Abd Allah b. Saba and a group of liars**. So, they never existed before then. [14](#)

He adds:

وهذا معروف عن ابن سبأ واتباعه وهو الذي ابتدع النص في علي وابتدع أنه معصوم

And this is well-known about Ibn Saba and his followers. **He was the one who innovated the *nass* (i.e. a claim of prophetic appointment as *khalifah*) for ‘Ali, and innovated the claim that he (‘Ali) was *mas’um* (infallible).** [15](#)

The only problem here is that there is ZERO evidence provided to support these claims. Merely claiming that the rumours were “well-known” is not sufficient. An authentically transmitted eye-witness account is required in cases like this. None is quoted anyway, anywhere!

Were there any the other “innovations” created by ‘Abd Allah b. Saba? Our Shaykh proceeds:

قلنا نعم وأشهر الناس بالردة خصوم أبي بكر الصديق رضي الله عنه وأتباعه كمسيلمة الكذاب وأتباعه وغيرهم وهؤلاء تتولاهم الرافضة كما ذكر ذلك غير واحد من شيوخهم مثل هذا الإمامي وغيره ويقولون إنهم كانوا على الحق وأن الصديق قاتلهم بغير حق ثم من أظهر الناس ردة الغالية الذين حرقهم علي رضي الله عنه بالنار لما ادعوا فيه الإلهية وهم السبائية أتباع عبدالله بن سبأ الذين أظهروا سب أبي بكر وعمر

We say: yes, the most notorious of mankind for apostasy were the enemies of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, may Allah be pleased with him, and his followers, such as Musaylamah the Liar and his followers and others. These people (i.e. the apostates) are loved by the Rafidhah, as mentioned by many of their *shuyukh*, like this Imami and others. They say that they (those apostates) were upon the truth, and that al-Siddiq fought them unjustly.

Those who were most notorious among mankind for extreme apostasy were **those burnt with fire by ‘Ali**, may Allah be pleased with him, **when they called him Allah. They were the Sabaiyyah, followers of ‘Abd Allah b. Saba, those who were the first to curse Abu Bakr and ‘Umar.** [16](#)

He reiterates the same elsewhere:

وأين شبهة مثل أبي موسى الأشعري الذي وافق عمرا على عزل علي ومعاوية وأن يجعل الأمر شورى في المسلمين من شبهة عبدالله بن سبأ وأمثاله الذين يدعون أنه إمام معصوم أو أنه إله أو نبي

Where is the confusion of the likes of Abu Musa al-Ash’ari who concurred with ‘Amr to dethrone (both) ‘Ali and Mu’awiyah and to subject the matter to consultation among the Muslims from the confusion of **‘Abd Allah b. Saba and his likes who called him (i.e. ‘Ali) an infallible Imam, or that he was Allah, or that he was a prophet?** [17](#)

Once more, our Shaykh makes no attempt to quote any report or chain for his submissions. Meanwhile, we have decided to help him out and his followers by actually checking the authenticity of all the primary Sunni *riwayat* about ‘Abd Allah b. Saba – especially all those ones that Sunnis table as evidence concerning him – in order to distinguish the truths from the fables. We sincerely hope that this work of ours will be highly beneficial to every soul seeking to learn the *real* truth about the character called Ibn Saba and the activities and doctrines that have been attributed to him. In this book, we have adopted the same strict investigative and transparent research methodology as we did in our first and second books. We implore Allah to forgive us all our mistakes, and to accept this as a worthy act of *‘ibadah*. And may

Allah send His *salawat* and *barakat* upon our master, Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah, and upon his purified offspring.

[1.](#) We must emphasize at this point that we, the Shi’ah Imamiyyah, do NOT deny the existence of ‘Abd Allah b. Saba. Those of us who do that are in error, and their opinion does not bind our madhhab. It is only the Qur’an and our authentic ahadith that do that. There indeed was once a man with that name, as our sahih reports establish. However, the only statement that is true about him – from all that the Ahl al-Sunnah claim – is that he considered Amir al-Muminin to be a god. Everything else is false, as nothing else is established in any reliable Sunni or Shi’i riwayat.

Absolutely nothing else at all! As such, all the political roles that the Ahl al-Sunnah have given to Ibn Saba, and all the other doctrines and beliefs that they have attributed to him, are only distortions of the true history. Meanwhile, our belief in the existence of the man, and his consideration of Imam ‘Ali as a god, are based strictly and solely upon our own authentic Shi’i ahadith. As for Sunnis, they do not have a single reliable report in all their books to establish even the existence of Ibn Saba, much less all the fairytales that they have attached to him!

[2.](#) We have seen efforts by some Sunni brothers to prove all the Sunni claims about ‘Abd Allah b. Saba by mentioning the existence and doctrines of a group called al-Sabaiyyah. In their opinion, if they can prove that a sect which attributed itself to Ibn Saba existed, then they have already proved the existence of the man himself. Moreover, if they are able to establish the doctrines of this sect, then they have established the original doctrines of the man. This is however a very poor methodology, which is based upon clear logical fallacies.

The fact that a group of people attribute themselves to an individual or an entity does NOT necessarily prove that he/she/it existed. Qur’an 7:71 and 53:19–23 give vivid examples. Al-Lat, al-‘Uzza and Manat were three Arab idols which existed only in “names”. They had no real existence. A lot of the other idols are like that. However, it is possible to find people who attribute themselves to such imaginary idols, and who even spread weird legends about the idols’ “achievements” and “teachings”! Besides that, it is quite possible to find people who have attributed themselves to a real being, but who do NOT truly or accurately represent him at all. Examples of these kinds of adherents abound in our midst. For instance, there are Christians who attribute themselves to the Christ, Prophet ‘Isa b. Maryam, ‘alaihima al-salam. Would it be accurate to determine the existence and true doctrines of the Christ through the existence and doctrines of Christians? On a more specific note, is it correct to claim that the Christ believed in his own divinity, or that he was the Son of God, simply because Christians make these claims? Of course, that would be very wrong!

In the same manner, it is wrong to try to prove the existence and doctrines of ‘Abd Allah b. Saba through the claims and doctrines of al-Sabaiyyah, who attributed themselves to him. Rather, separate authentic reports must be provided to independently and directly establish the existence of the man himself and his personal doctrines, beliefs and teachings.

[3.](#) ‘Ali Al Muhsin, ‘Abd Allah b. Saba: Dirasat wa Tahlil (1st edition, 1422 H), pp. 45–60

[4.](#) Ibid, p. 49

[5.](#) Ibid, p. 47

[6.](#) Ibid

[7.](#) Ibid

[8.](#) Ibid

[9.](#) Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Halim b. Taymiyyah al-Harrani, Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah (Muasassat Qurtubah; 1st edition, 1406 H) [annotator: Dr. Muhammad Rashad Salim], vol. 7, p. 136

[10.](#) Ibid, vol. 3, p. 138

[11.](#) Ibid, vol. 5, p. 481

[12.](#) Ibid, vol. 8, pp. 315–316

[13.](#) Ibid, vol. 8, pp. 478–479

[14.](#) Ibid, vol. 8, p. 251

[15.](#) Ibid, vol. 7, p. 220

[16.](#) Ibid, vol. 3, pp. 458–459

[17.](#) Ibid, vol. 2, p. 61

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