

Fatima Zahra in the Words of the Infallibles



**Zahra Ikhwan Sarraf, Sayyid Murtada
Hussayni Shah Turab**

**Translated by
Asma Sultan**

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Authors(s):

Zahra Ikhwan Sarraf [3]

Sayyid Murtada Hussayni Shah Turab [4]

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Asma Sultan [6]

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This article introduces some of the facets of Fatima al-Zahra's status and personality by relying on the words of the Prophet, the Imams, and Lady Fatima herself. Some of her merits include her being a leader of all women who was infallible, an angel in the form of a human, and an intercessor on the Day of Judgment.

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Zahra Ikhwan Sarraf 1 and Sayyid Murtada Hussayni Shah Turab2

Translated by Asma Sultan

Abstract

Muslims have always had high regard for Lady Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, the wife of Imam Ali, the mother of all the Imams, and the most exemplary woman in Islam. Despite many efforts made to introduce this unique woman to the people of the world, more work is to be done.

This article introduces some of the facets of her status and personality by relying on the words of the Prophet, the Imams, and Lady Fatima herself. Some of her merits include her being a leader of all women who was infallible, an angel in the form of a human, and an intercessor on the Day of Judgment.

She was privileged with having spoken to the angels and her pleasure and displeasure was God's pleasure and displeasure. Moreover, heaven is given as a reward to those who send their peace on her.

Introduction

Understanding the personality of Fatima al-Zahra is a source of better understanding the teachings of Islam and the events before and after the demise of the Prophet, and benefiting from this great role model. In this regard, many Islamic writers and thinkers recount various aspects of Lady Fatima's personality.

In doing so, they refer to the words of the Ahlul Bayt who knew her better than anyone else. The narrations used in this article are those accepted by both Shi'a and Sunni scholars.

Fatima al-Zahra in the words of Prophet Muhammad

Certainly no one knows Lady Fatima better than her father, Prophet Muhammad.

Fatima the leader of the Muslim women

The Prophet of Islam – the leader of the Islamic Nation (Ummah) – when describing Fatima al-Zahra says, “Fatima is the leader of the women of this nation.”³

With these words, the Prophet is introducing Fatima as the best, most perfect, most exemplary Muslim woman.

Fatima – the perfect human being

The Prophet said, “Many men have reached perfection, but from among all women only four women have [reached perfection]; no other woman apart from these four will reach this status. Those four women are: Asiya⁴, Maryam⁵, Khadijah⁶ and Fatima.”⁷⁸

In other words, the Prophet presents these four women as the best and highest moral and practical

examples for women in all ages – from the past until the future – whom all women should follow.

Fatima – an angel in the form of a human

The Prophet, who knows the realities of this world and the next better than anyone else, while addressing Asma bint ‘Umayy, said, “Asma! Surely Fatima is an angel who has been created in the mould of a human being.”⁹

In another place he said, “My daughter Fatima is an angel in the face of human beings.”¹⁰

This expression of the Prophet is one of the best expressions present about the personality of Lady Fatima. It reveals her infallibility and purity from sins and impurities since an angel is the manifestation of beauty, pleasantness, tenderness, and purity. From another angle, she is the symbol of infallibility and virtue because of her heavenly existence.

Fatima – fragranced with the scent of Heaven

The Seal of the Prophets repeatedly mentioned, “Whenever I would yearn for Heaven, I would breathe in the scent of Fatima.¹¹ And whenever he desired the fragrance of Heaven, he would kiss Fatima.”¹²

Fatima is the height of goodness and virtue

The Prophet used to praise the personality of Lady Fatima by saying, “If goodness and virtue was in the form of a person, surely that person would be Fatima; in fact, Fatima would be better than that person, for definitely my daughter Fatima is the best of creation in terms of descent, honour, and nobility.”¹³

These words of the prophet show the boundless perfection of Lady Fatima.

Fatima – the bright star of guidance

The Prophet once said to his companions, “Look for the sun; when the sun is hidden in the night, look for the moon. When the moon is hidden, search for Venus, the evening star; and when that, too, is hidden, look for the two bright stars in the Ursa Minor.”¹⁴

“His companions asked him, ‘O Prophet of God. Who is the sun?’ He replied, ‘I am the sun.’ They asked, ‘Who is the moon?’ He replied, ‘Ali.’ The companions asked, ‘Who is Venus?’ The Prophet replied, ‘Fatima.’ They asked, ‘Who are the two stars of the Ursa Minor? He answered, ‘Hasan and Husayn.’”¹⁵

With this, the Prophet clearly showed the path of guidance to the Islamic Ummah. He compared himself as being the bright sun of guidance, Ali as the glowing moon that a person must turn to and benefit from its light when the sun is hidden, and compared Lady Zahra and the Hassanain to the bright stars of guidance towards God.

Fatima – A part of the Prophet

A great number of narrations with similar content have been narrated from the Prophet where he says, “Fatima is a part of me; whoever hurts her has hurt me, and whoever pleases her has pleased me.”¹⁶

These narrations show the extent of the emotional connection between the Prophet and Fatima al-Zahra. They also portray Fatima’s absolute obedience to divine commands, and sincerity and steadfastness in servitude to God and His Prophet, that she took no steps outside the line of truth, such that her happiness and pleasure was the happiness and pleasure of the Prophet and her pain was the pain of the Prophet.

It is for this reason that the Prophet addressed her as "a part of me" and announced her pain to be his and her pleasure to be his.

Fatima – A reason for the Prophet’s happiness

The Prophet has said, “Fatima is the joy and happiness of my heart. Her sons are the fruit of my heart, her husband is the light of my eyes, and the Imams from the progeny of her son are the trustees of my God and the rope that connects God and His creatures. Whoever holds on to them will be saved and whoever goes against them has gone astray.”¹⁷

The words of the Prophet indicate that looking at Fatima, sitting with her and her very existence are a source of happiness and joy for the Prophet. This hadith is also used as a commentary to the Hadith of Thaqaalayn.¹⁸

Friendship and enmity with Fatima is friendship and enmity with the Prophet

In numerous places the Prophet has pointed to the true status of Lady Fatima and, addressing Fatima, her husband Ali and their sons Hasan and Husayn as said, “I am the enemy of anyone who is your enemy and the friend anyone who is your friend with.”¹⁹

Therefore, friendship with Fatima, her husband, and children means friendship with the Prophet, and enmity with them is enmity with him.

Fatima – A unique existence

Fatima has such a high status that she is unparalleled in this world, as the Prophet has mentioned, “If it wasn’t for Ali there would be no [compatible] partner for Fatima.”²⁰

Fatima's pleasure and displeasure is God's pleasure and displeasure

The Prophet repeatedly said, “Surely God is angered whenever Fatima is angry, and is pleased when Fatima is pleased.”²¹

Imam Ali has narrated another narration that the Prophet – addressing Fatima – said: “Surely God is angered when you are angry and is pleased when you are pleased.”²²

Lady Fatima has reached such a status of servitude and obedience in that she is angered and pleased only for God’s sake, and not as a result of personal desires.

Fatima Zahra in the words of the Imams

From among the writers and speakers who have described her, the Imams have a prominent and greater role in our recognition of her qualities because they are her progeny and can introduce her better than anyone. In truth, if they and their eloquent words in describing her personality and status were not present, our information and recognition today regarding the Lady would be very limited.

Below are some sayings of the Imams in this regard:

Fatima's understanding and knowledge of the Prophet

Imam Baqir has narrated, “Some war booty had reached Imam Ali and he gifted it to Fatima. She went to the bazaar and bought two silver bracelets and a curtain. When she returned home, she put on the bracelets and hung the curtains.

The Prophet was travelling at this time, and when he returned he went to the mosque, since it was his usual habit when he returned from a trip to go to Imam Ali’s house from the mosque to visit Fatima. Fatima, who had heard that her father had returned, hurried enthusiastically and happily to welcome her father; but as soon as the Prophet saw the silver bracelets on her hand and the curtains at the door, he returned.

Fatima’s eyes filled with tears; she said, “My father has never reacted in this way with me.” She removed the curtain from the entrance, took off the bracelets, and called Hasan and Husayn. She then sent bracelets and the curtain with them and said, “Go to my father and give him my salaam.”

The young Hasan and Husayn went to the Prophet and gave their mother’s greetings, including the parcel she had given them. The Prophet hugged and kissed both of them and sat them on his knee. After that, he asked that the bracelets be broken and have the pieces distributed among the shelterless and poor Muhajirs (the companions of Saffah).

He also gave the curtains to those who had no clothes. He then said, “May God have mercy on Fatima and clothe her with Heavenly clothes in return for this curtain and reward her with Heavenly ornaments in reward for these two bracelets.”²³

Fatima's knowledge

Imam Baqir once narrated that Imam Ali came to Fatima while being upset. When Fatima asked why, he replied:

The Prophet of God asked us a question we couldn't answer. The question was "What is a woman?" We replied, "Something private that has been clothed." He then asked, "When is a woman closest to her Lord?" And then we had no answer. Fatima replied, "Go back to the Prophet and tell him that a woman is closest to her Lord when she remains at home."

Imam Ali returned to the Prophet and related the answer to him. The Prophet asked, "O Ali! Who told you this answer?" Imam Ali explained all that had passed between him and Fatima. After hearing the words of Ali, the Prophet said, "What she said is true; surely Fatima is a part of me."²⁴

Considering the social conditions of early Islam and the related verses, we can conclude from Lady Fatima's saying – that a woman staying in her house is closest to her Lord – refers to staying away from revealing herself to, and unnecessarily interacting with, non-mahrams. This means that she is to refrain from a) leaving the house without reason, b) revealing the parts of her body that must be covered (or beautifying herself), and c) engaging in unnecessary and immoral conversations with non-mahrams.

Lady Fatima implements the best of hijab

Imam Sajjad narrates, "Once a blind man sought permission from Fatima to enter her house, and when he entered, Fatima hid herself from his sight. The Prophet, who was present and a witness to this scene, said: 'Fatima, why did you hide yourself from him when he can't see you?' She replied, 'O Prophet of God, although he cannot see me, I can see him and my scent will reach him.' The Prophet praised her and said, 'I bear witness that you are a part of me.'²⁵

A similar incident has also been narrated from Imam Ali.²⁶ In another hadith, Imam Ali asked Fatima, "Who are the best of women?" The noble and pious Lady replied, "When she does not see (non-mahram) men and (non-mahram) men do not see her."²⁷

In the incident with the blind man, Lady Fatima indicates two things: 1) Hijab, chastity, and piety is not limited to keeping oneself away from the sight of non-mahrams, but also not looking at non-mahrams – or controlling our sight from looking at them – is considered a prerequisite to hijab, and 2) smelling the scent and perfume of a person by a non-mahram can also excite the emotions and desires and can cause one to fall into sin.

The Prophet's love for Fatima

The Prophet's high regard for Lady Fatima as that of a woman who was held with high esteem is seen in

Imam Baqir's narration: "Whenever the Prophet decided to travel, he would bid farewell to his family members first; in the end, he would say goodbye to Fatima. The last person he would meet before travelling was Fatima and the first person whose house he would visit upon his return was Fatima."²⁸

Lady Fatima – one of those who cried the most

Imam Sadiq said, "There are five people who are 'bakka'un' (those who cried a lot): Adam, Ya'qub, Yusuf, Fatima, and Ali, son of Husayn."²⁹

Imam al-Sadiq said that Fatima cried so much after the death of the Prophet that some of the people of Medina were bothered by the sound of her wailing. They would say to her, "You have vexed us by your constant tears." After that, Fatima would go and cry for long periods besides the grave of the martyrs until she would calm down and eventually return home.³⁰

This constant crying of Fatima in the few months after the death of the Prophet, apart from the political messages it portrayed, exposed her great love for the Prophet.

Lady Fatima is pure of all evil

It has been narrated by Imam Sadiq, "Fatima has nine heavenly names: Fatima, Siddiqah, Mubarakah, Taherah, Zakiyyah, Raaziyah, Marziyyah, Muhaddathah, and Zahra. He then asked, "Do you know what the name 'Fatima' means? It means, 'She is separated from all evil.'"³¹

Therefore, Fatima was given this name because she is pure of all things evil and indecent and is the epitome of all things good and beautiful.

Lady Fatima is a star for the inhabitants of the skies

Imam Sadiq was asked, "Why was Fatima given the name 'Zahra'? He replied, "Because when she would stand in the place of prayer (mihrab), her light would shine upon the inhabitants of the skies just as the stars shine upon the inhabitants of the Earth."³²

Lady Fatima is the leader of the women of the world

Mufaddal ibn 'Umar says, "I asked Imam Sadiq to explain these words of the Prophet where he says, 'Fatima is the leader of the women of the world.' Is she the leader of the women of her time?" Imam Sadiq replied, "It was Maryam who was the leader of the women of her time; Fatima is the leader of all women, from the beginning until the end."³³

Lady Fatima spoke to angels

Imam Sadiq said, "Fatima was given the name 'Muhaddatha' because the angels would descend to the Earth and converse with her, just as they would converse with Lady Maryam, the daughter of Imran. They would say to her, 'O Fatima! Surely God has chosen and purified you and favoured you over the

women of the world. O Fatima! Perform qunoot³⁴ and prostration (sajdah) for your Lord and genuflect (ruku') with the ones who perform genuflection.'

One night Fatima asked them, 'Isn't Maryam – the daughter of Imran – the one who has been favoured above the women of the world?' They said, 'Surely, Maryam is the leader of the women of her own time, and God Almighty has chosen you as the leader of all the women of all times.'"³⁵

Lady Fatima's love for others in her prayers

Imam Hasan narrates, "I saw my mother in the prayer site (mihrab) on Friday night when she continuously performed genuflection and prostration until the sun rose. I heard her praying for the believing men and women; she would mention their names and sincerely prayed for them, but asked nothing for herself. I said to her, 'My dear mother! Why don't you pray for yourself as you pray for others? She replied, 'My son, we must first pray for our neighbours (i.e. others) and then for ourselves.'"³⁶

Lady Fatima – a person like no other

When describing his honourable mother Lady Fatima, Imam Sadiq said, "If Imam Ali had not married her, there would be no match for her on this Earth until the Day of Judgement."³⁷

The eighth Imam also narrates that after the wedding of Ali and Fatima, God said to his Prophet, "If I had not created Ali there would be no match for your daughter on this earth."³⁸

Lady Fatima as a wife

Imam Baqir narrates, "Fatima made a commitment to Ali that she would perform the duties in the house, such as kneading and baking the bread, as well as sweeping the house. One day Ali asked Fatima, 'Do you have any food in the house?' She replied, "We don't, I swear by the one who made your right great. It is three days that we do not have any food in the house from which I can give you.'

Ali said, 'Why didn't you let me know?' She answered, 'The Prophet of God forbade me to ask anything of you. The Prophet had said, 'Do not ask anything of your cousin. If he brings something for you accept it, otherwise do not ask.'"³⁹

From this narration we can understand a few important points about Lady Fatima as a wife:

Dividing the duties of the married life with her husband Ali and undertaking the duties inside their house.

Knowing the rights of her husband, and her own duties to him, as seen in her statement, "I swear by the one who made your right great."

Her forbearance with her husband in the financial affairs of her home, even to the point of bearing some difficulties.

Lady Fatima's diligence in housework

Imam Ali told a member of Bani Sa'd, "Should I enlighten you about myself and Fatima – the daughter of the Prophet of God, the dearest part of his family to him and my wife?

She ground so much wheat with her hands that they blistered, brought so much water in the mashk (leather bottles used to carry water at that time) that the marks of the bottle remained on her back, worked in the house and swept the floor so much that her clothes became worn out, and lit so much fire in the furnace until she became ill."⁴⁰

Lady Fatima – the truthful, the martyred

Imam Kazim has said, "Surely, Fatima is Siddiqah (the most truthful) and Shahidah (the martyred).⁴¹ The title Siddiqah is given due to honesty and truthfulness in her actions, words, and beliefs; moreover, she was in fact martyred.

Fatima in the words of Fatima

Though describing Lady Fatima's persona is no simple task, it is possible to deduce some aspects of her personality and merits from her own words.

Heaven is the reward of one who sends peace and blessings to Lady Fatima

A narrator says, "I once visited Fatima and said 'salam' to her. She replied to it and then said, 'During his lifetime, my father said to me,

'Whoever sends peace and greets us in three days, Heaven is his reward.' The narrator asked, 'Is this limited to the lifetime of you and Prophet or does it also apply after you and he have passed away?' She replied, 'It does not make a difference whether it is during our lifetime or after our death.'"⁴²

Lady Fatima is pleased with what pleases God

When Imam Ali came to the Prophet to ask for Fatima's hand in marriage, the Prophet consulted Fatima and said, "My daughter Fatima! Your cousin Ali has asked for your hand in marriage; what is your opinion? She replied, 'My pleasure is in whatever God and His Prophet are pleased with.'"⁴³

Lady Fatima's contentment

She said to her husband Ali, "I feel ashamed to ask you for something that you cannot do."⁴⁴

Lady Fatima's attachments in this world

Lady Fatima has said, "I love three things in this world: To spend in the way of God, recitation of the book of God, and gazing at the face of my father, the Prophet of God."⁴⁵

Lady Fatima's excellence in the words of the Prophet

Lady Fatima narrates: "When the verse from the chapter Light (Nur 63) was revealed – 'Make not the calling of the messenger among you as your calling one of another'⁴⁶ – I was afraid to address the Prophet of God as "father." The Prophet turned away from me and said, 'My daughter, this verse is not for you or your family or progeny. You are from me and I am from you. This verse is for the selfish and arrogant oppressors from among the Quraysh. You address me as father, because this is more beloved to me and it pleases God.'⁴⁷

Lady Fatima: A member of the household of the Prophet

Fatima narrates, "One day I went to visit the Prophet of God and he spread a cloth for me to sit on. After a while Hasan came and he also had him sit on that cloth. Husayn came as well and he too sat. Then Ali joined the group. After this, the Prophet held another piece of cloth over their heads and said, 'O God! These are the members of my household and I am from them. My Lord! Be pleased with them as I am pleased with them.'⁴⁸

Lady Fatima: An intercessor of the Day of Judgement

Regarding her intercession, Lady Fatima says, "I will intercede for the sinners from among the ummah of my father when I am raised on the Day of Judgement."⁴⁹

Conclusion

This paper offered a description of Lady Fatima by the Prophet, the Imams, and herself. The Prophet introduces Fatima as the leader of the women of the world; she is one of the few perfect women in this world, an angel in the form of a human being perfumed with the scent of Heaven.

If virtue had a face it would be in the form of Fatima and indeed, even greater than that person. She is the bright star of guidance and a part of the Prophet; she is his joy, her children the apple of his heart, and her husband – Ali – the light of his eyes.

Friendship and enmity with Fatima is friendship and enmity with the God and the Prophet and her pleasure and displeasure is God and the Prophet's pleasure and displeasure.

The Imams too have spoken of her deep understanding of the Prophet as well as her great wisdom and knowledge. She was the dearest person to Prophet; and she too loved him greatly. They have also

referred to her as someone who has implemented the best modest dress (hijab).

She was pure of all evils, and when she stood in prayer, her light would shine upon the inhabitants of the skies. She is the leader of the women of the world and showed her immense love for others, especially during her prayers. She was modest in front of her husband Ali and diligent when performing her household duties.

She describes herself as someone whose pleasure is that of God's, as someone who loves the Prophet greatly, is a part of his household, is an intercessor on the Day of Judgement and loves three things from this world: spending in the path of God, reciting the book of God (Qur'an) and gazing at the face of the Prophet.

The Prophet and Imams deeply comprehended Lady Fatima for her noble qualities and roles as a daughter, wife, and mother; indeed, she was the ideal Muslim woman as she served the most perfect example for all.

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19. Tirmzi, 1421 (A.H.), page 1007, hadith no. 3879/ Ibne Ahmad Makki, 1418 (A.H.) vol. 1, p. 101, hadith no. 26/ Ibne Hajar Asqalani, 1415 (A.H.), vol. 8, p. 266/ Ibne Athir Juzri, 1419 (A.H.), vol. 6, p. 228.
20. Ibne Ahmad Makki, 1418 (A.H.), vol. 1, p. 107, hadith no. 38/ Juwayni Khurasani, 1400 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 68.
21. Juwayni, 1400 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 46, hadith no. 378/ Haakim Neyshapoori, 1406 (A.H.), vol. 3, page 153/ Arbali, 1401 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 93.
22. Ibne Magazeli, 1424 (A.H.), p. 285, hadith no. 401, Haakim Neyshapoori, 1406 (A.H.), vol. 10, p. 116/ Qandoozi 1418 (A.H.), vol. 1, p. 204/ Tabari, 1413 (A.H.), p. 146/ Ibne Hajar Asqalani, 1415 (A.H.), vol. 8, p. 266/ Ibne Athir Juzri, 1419 (A.H.), vol. 6, p. 227/ Ibne Jozi, 1401 (A.H.), p. 279.
23. Majlisi, 1421 (A.H.), vol. 18, pp. 64–65.
24. Ibne Magazeli, 1424 (A.H.), p. 304, hadith no. 430.
25. Ibne Hakim Shami, 1420 (A.H.), p. 457.

26. Ibne Magazeli, 1424 (A.H.), pp. 303–304, hadith no. 429.
27. Ibne Ahmad Makki, 1418 (a.h.), vol. 1, p. 103, hadith 29.
28. Majlisi, 1421 (A.H.), vol. 18, p. 64.
29. Ayyashi, 1421 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 358, no. 2133/61.
30. Arbali, 1401 (A.H.), vol. 1, p. 498.
31. Shaykh Saduq, 1408 (A.H.), p. 212, section 142, hadith no. 3/ Shaykh Saduq 1410 (A.H.), p. 474/ Majlisi, 1421 (A.H.), vol. 18, p. 13/ Arbali, 1401 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 89/ Tabari, 1413 (A.H.), pp. 79–80, Ibne Hakim Shami, 1420 (A.H.), p. 445.
32. Shaykh Saduq, 1361 (A.H.), p. 64, section 28, hadith no. 15/ Same, 1408 (A.H.), vol. 1, pp. 143 and 215, hadith no. 3/ Tabari, 1413 (A.H.), p. 149/ Majlisi, 1421 (A.H.), vol. 18, p. 15.
33. Tabari, 1413 (A.H.), p. 149.
34. Literally means "the act of standing": special supplications made in prayers while in the standing position.
35. Same, p. 80/ Ibne Hakim Shami, 1420 (A.H.), p. 456.
36. Shaykh Saduq, 1408 (A.H.), vol. 1, p. 215, section 145, hadith no. 1/ Arbali, 1401 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 94/ Tabari, 1413 (A.H.), p. 152/ Majlisi, 1421 (A.H.), vol. 18, p. 63.
37. Shaykh Saduq, 1408 (A.H.), vol. 1, p. 212, section 142, hadith no. 3 / Arbali, 1401 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 89 / Tabari 1413 (A.H.), pp. 79–80/ Ibne Hakim Shami, 1420 (A.H.), p. 445.
38. Ataridi, 1413 (A.H.), vol. 1, p. 141, hadith no. 177.
39. Ayyashi, 1421 (A.H.), vol. 1, pp. 303–304, hadith no. 681/42.
40. Shaykh Saduq, 1408 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 65, section 88, hadith no. 1/ Ibne Jozi, 1401 (A.H.), p. 280/ Majlisi, 1421 (A.H.), vol. 18, p. 63.
41. Majlisi, 1363 (A.H.), vol. 5, p. 315, hadith no. 2.
42. Ibne Magazeli, 1424 (A.H.), p. 292, hadith no. 410.
43. Mar'ashi Najafi, 1417 (A.H.), vol. 23, p. 477.
44. Shustari, 1391 (A.H.), vol. 10, p. 323/ Qandoozi Hanafi, 1418 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 236.
45. Shaykh al Islami, 1419 (A.H.), p. 161, hadith no. 93.
46. لَا تَجْعَلُوا دُعَاءَ الرَّسُولِ بَيْنَكُمْ كَدُعَاءِ بَعْضِكُمْ بَعْضًا
47. Ibne Magazeli, 1424 (A.H.), pp. 292–293, hadith no. 411/ Ibne Hakim Shami, 1420 (A.H.), p. 462.
48. Qandoozi, 1418 (A.H.), vol. 2, p. 305.
49. Shustari, 1391 (A.H.), vol. 10, page 367

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