

# **WIFE BEATING IN ISLAM**

by [Silas](#)

- 1) **INTRODUCTION - STATUS OF THE WIFE IN ISLAM**
- 2) **THE QURAN AND ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING**
- 3) **THE HADITH ON WIFE BEATING**
- 4) **THE BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL ON WIFE BEATING**
- 5) **THE SCHOLARS ON WIFE BEATING**
- 6) **ADDITIONAL ISLAMIC WRITINGS ON WIFE BEATING**
- 7) **DAMAGE DUE TO WIFE BEATING**
- 8) **ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING IN AMERICA**
- 9) **ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING THROUGHOUT THE WORLD**
- 10) **MUSLIM'S DEFENSE OF WIFE BEATING**
- 11) **QUESTIONS**
- 12) **CONCLUSION**
- 13) **WHERE TO TURN TO FOR HELP**

## **APPENDICES**

- 14) **REVIEW OF THE WORD "BEAT"**
  - 15) **REVIEW OF "NUSHUZ"**
  - 16) **CRITIQUE OF MUHAMMAD ASAD'S TRANSLATION AND NOTES**
  - 17) **REFERENCES**
-

## 1) INTRODUCTION - STATUS OF THE WIFE IN ISLAM

One of the more controversial issues in Islam is the Quran's authorization for husbands to beat disobedient wives. This is found in chapter 4, called "Women", verse 34. Additional information on Islamic wife beating is found in Muhammad's Traditions (Hadith), and Sira (biographical material). Many people have criticized Islam because of this harsh sanction, and many Muslims have written articles seeking ways to mollify or defend it. In review of the actual teachings of the Quran, Hadith, and Sira, Islam is rightly criticized. This command is not only a harsh way to treat one's wife, it portrays the degraded position of married women in Islam. It will be shown from the Quran, Hadith, Sira, and other Islamic writings that this "Islamic" wife beating is physical and painful.

Please note that wife beating is not only an Islamic problem. It is a common occurrence throughout the entire world. Some cultures accept it more readily than others. However, Islam accepts the practice to an extent that Muslim societies do not see it as a problem.

Before moving on and addressing the subject of Islamic wife beating in detail, I want to pause and examine a more crucial point: **the exhortation to beat the disobedient wife is not an aberration, oddity, disjointed concept, or stand alone element, in Islam's positioning of females, rather, the command to beat disobedient wives is founded upon a woman's subservient / secondary status in Islam.** You cannot separate the issue of wife beating apart from the context of her inferior position in the marriage relationship.

To fully comprehend the issue of Islamic wife beating her position with respect to her husband must be first understood. Wife beating is allowed because of the lower position she occupies. A person with a severe virus may run a high fever. While the fever can be quite a grave problem it is actually a symptom of another sickness at work. Wife beating is a symptom of the wife's degraded status in Islam. Beyond the right of husbands to beat their disobedient wives, there is a deeper, more pernicious, disease at work. Wife beating is merely the bad fruit of a bad root. Once this element is understood the rationale behind Muhammad's command to beat disobedient wives comes into focus and fits in its proper place.

When I first began to study the topic, I did not realize that an Islamic marriage is not equivalent to a Christian marriage. Its rules, roles, and requirements are quite different. In a Christian marriage, the husband is given the role as head of the household, and the wife is expected to submit to the husband's leadership. However, she is his equal in terms of social and religious status; she is not inferior to him. In Islam, the husband is the custodian of his wife. She is considered to be in-between slave and free. The woman is managed and controlled. The relationship between a married woman and her husband is similar to the relationship between parents and children. Parents have a responsible custody of their children and expect their obedience. When children are disobedient they are disciplined and sometimes spanked. Muhammad's viewpoint of women was that they

lack self-control, and thus for their own good, and societies' good, they must be subordinate to their husbands. They must obey. Although an adult woman is more mature and capable than a child she is still not equal to a man; thus is subject to him. Islam teaches that men are superior to women. When a man gives his bride a dowry, he is accredited the right to manage his wife. By accepting his dowry, a woman is giving her husband the right to her regulation.

**I am not saying that the wife is the husband's slave.** Her status is above that of a slave. Muhammad urged his followers to treat their wives well. He did not want to see them beaten without cause. He wanted good marriage relationships between husband and wife. However, his desires for happy marriages and kind treatment do not mitigate the authority he gave men over women or the position he ascribed to women. In Islamic thought, in Muhammad's thought, the wife is not considered the husband's equal, rather, she is an inferior, subordinate partner, who is to be treated gently and kindly, but still under the man's authority. While the Muslim husband may love and respect his wife and treat her with great kindness, the foundational principles of their marriage remain. If she persists in disobedience to his wishes he has the right, even the responsibility, to beat her, to bring her into submission once again, and re-establish a "happy" marriage.

In this article, I am going to address the primary theme of Islamic wife beating based upon the teachings of the Quran, Hadith, Sira, and renowned Islamic scholars. Following that I will present information on both the physical and psychological damage women suffer as a result of being beaten then present a review of current wife beating in America, the Mideast, and elsewhere. I will pose some questions for thought, present a short conclusion, and provide places to call for help. I've also included short reviews of some key words and review of a prominent Muslim scholar's attempt to mollify Muhammad's command to beat disobedient wives.

---

## 2) THE QURAN AND ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING

I present 6 English versions of the Quran from chapter 4, called Nisa (Women), verse 34. I provided all these not to be redundant but to show how similar the versions are. These translations are all from recognized scholars. I have corrected some archaic spelling. My comments are in [ ] type brackets.

### TEXT FROM THE QURAN, 4:34

**RODWELL [1]:** "Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God has gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they make from their substance for them. Virtuous women are obedient, careful, during the husband's absence, because God has of them been careful. But chide those for whose refractoriness you have cause to fear; remove them into beds apart, and scourge them: but if they are obedient to you, then seek not occasion against them: verily, God is High, Great!"

['Refractoriness' means hard or impossible to manage, stubbornly disobedient'].

**DAWOOD [2]:** "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. Surely God is high, supreme."

**PICKTHALL [3]:** "Men are in charge of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High Exalted, Great."

**ARBERRY [4]:** "Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another, and for that they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them; God is All high, All great."

**SHAKIR [5]:** Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in their sleeping places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great.

**ALI [6]:** "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whom part you fear disloyalty and ill conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance) for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).

I placed Ali's version last because I have an important comment to make on his translation. Ali knew he was writing for a Western audience and that wife beating is viewed as brutal in the West. Consequently, Ali inserted many of his own words into the Quran's text in order to make it less harsh. This was deceptive on Ali's part. Ali inserted his comments at 9 different places in the 4:34 text. I've done a quick review through Ali's Quran, and have not found any other verse with that many insertions. Clearly something was troubling him to cause him to add so much. Notice not one other translation has anything remotely near "lightly" when talking about the physical beating a man is

supposed to give his wife. Ali was in part a Muslim apologist and his work here was meant to hide and soften the Quran's real meaning.

I note that Muslim apologists like Ali frequently say that the beating should be 'light'. But in the context of the Quran it has to be severe enough to bring her into obedience. And it must produce a stronger psychological effect that verbal chastisement and sexual desertion produce. In other words - it's got to hurt. But the husband is not to whip her like a slave or severely injure the wife.

## **ANALYSIS**

The Quran lists a progression of steps to be used in dealing with a rebellious wife:

- 1) The husband is to verbally admonish her
- 2) If that fails the husband is to sexually desert his wife
- 3) If both measures above fail the husband is exhorted to physically beat his wife.

[**NOTE:** It must be noted that obedience to her husband is not required if he orders her to do something sinful, causes her physical pain, or something she is incapable of doing].

This passage in the Quran lays the foundation for wife beating. Without it, the case for beating the wife would be somewhat weaker. Wife beating is amply testified in the Hadith, but having a corroborating verse in the Quran places the permissible action of wife beating on a solid foundation.

As I pointed out in the introduction, do not focus only on the command to beat the disobedient wife, also examine the superior position the man has over the woman. Review the beginning of the verse --- men are "superior", men have "authority", men are "in charge", men are "the managers", men are "the maintainers". Clearly, Muhammad put the man over the wife, he is her custodian, he responsibly maintains her, she obeys him. That is a foundational premise in an Islamic marriage.

---

## **3) THE TRADITIONS (HADITH) ON ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING**

The Hadith contain more information relative to how wife beating existed in the early Islamic culture. There are a variety of writings, all illustrating various facets of the husband – wife relationship and physical violence against the wife. I will mention several of them to bring out the wife's lower position in the marriage, and the exact type of wife beating that occurred in Muhammad's time, with his approval. In some cases due to the length I will only quote relevant portions of a Hadith.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND ON 4:34

Here is the reference for the background of 4:34.

"A woman complained to Muhammad that her husband slapped her on the face, (which was still marked by the slap). At first the prophet said to her: "Get even with him", but then added: "Wait until I think about it". Later on, Allah supposedly revealed 4:34 to Muhammad, after which the prophet said: "We wanted one thing but Allah wanted another, and what Allah wanted is best". [To beat your wife is best.]

The above quote comes from **Razi's "At-Tafsir al-Kabir" on 4:34** (Quoted in **"Beyond the Veil [7]**). Razi is one of the greatest Muslim scholars.

Here is a Hadith from **Bukhari [8], vol. 7, # 715**, that supports the case:

"Narrated Ikrima: 'Rifaa divorced his wife whereupon Abdur-Rahman married her. Aisha said that the lady came wearing a green veil and complained to her (Aisha) and showed her a green spot on her skin caused by beating. It was the habit of ladies to support each other, so when Allah's messenger came, Aisha said, "I have not seen any woman suffering as much as the believing women. Look! Her skin is greener than her clothes! When Abdur-Rahman heard that his wife had gone to the prophet, he came with his two sons from another wife. She said, "By Allah! I have done no wrong to him, but he is impotent and is as useless to me as this," holding and showing the fringe of her garment. Abdur-Rahman said, "By Allah, O Allah's messenger! She has told a lie. I am very strong and can satisfy her, but she is disobedient and wants to go back to Rifaa." Allah's messenger said to her, "If that is your intention, then know that it is unlawful for you to remarry Rifaa unless Abdur-Rahman has had sexual intercourse with you." The prophet saw two boys with Abdur-Rahman and asked (him), "Are these your sons?" On that Abdur-Rahman said, "Yes." The prophet said, "You claim what you claim (that he is impotent)? But by Allah, these boys resemble him as a crow resembles a crow.'"

Let's note several items from this Hadith.

- 1) A woman was beaten by her husband because of marriage discord. The woman did not commit any illegal sexual act. She was beaten and bruised because her husband said she was "disobedient" and he thought she wanted to go back to her former husband.
- 2) The Muslim women were suffering more than the non-Muslim women (via Aisha's comment), note it is said in the plural. This tells you just how good Muslim women back then really had it. Things were so bad for them, that they had to "support" each other.
- 3) The woman was badly bruised.

- 4) Muhammad did not re-prove the man for beating his wife. In fact, he reproached the women for saying Rahman was impotent. Even though she was bruised, Muhammad accepted it.

### **OTHER HADITH AND TRADITIONS ON WIFE BEATING**

Following are a number of various Hadith that relate instances or comments on wife beating. Again, I have edited several of these because of length.

#### **ABU JAHM, A WELL KNOWN WIFE BEATER**

##### **SAHIH MUSLIM [9]. Book 009, Number 3512:**

...When my period of 'Idda was over, I mentioned to him [Muhammad] that Mu'awiya b. Abu Sufyan and Jahm had sent proposal of marriage to me, whereupon Allah's said: As for Abu Jahm, he does not put down his staff from his shoulder, and as for Mu'awiya, he is a poor man having no property; marry Usama b. Zaid. I objected to him, but he again said: Marry Usama; so I married him. Allah blessed there in and I was envied (by others).

##### **SAHIH MUSLIM Book 009, Number 3526:**

...So I informed him [Muhammad]. (By that time) Mu'awiya, Abu Jahm and Usama b. Zaid had given her the proposal of marriage. Allah's Messenger said: So far as Mu'awiya is concerned, he is a poor man without any property. So far as Abu Jahm is concerned, he is a great beater of women, but Usama b. Zaid... She pointed with her hand (that she did not approve of the idea of marrying) Usama. But Allah's Messenger said: Obedience to Allah and obedience to His Messenger is better for thee. She said: So I married him, and I became an object of envy.

##### **SAHIH MUSLIM Book 009, Number 3527:**

...She said: Mu'awiya and Abu'l-Jahm were among those who had given me the proposal of marriage. Thereupon Allah's Apostle said: Mu'awiya is destitute and in poor condition and Abu'l-Jahm is very harsh with women (or he beats women, or like that), you should take Usama b. Zaid (as your husband).

### **COMMENT**

These three Hadith illustrate that some Muslim husbands could legally beat their wives without any retaliatory consequences. Abu Jahm was known to beat his wives and although Muhammad may not have cared for it, it certainly was allowed within the Islamic community.

##### **HADITH OF THE SUNAN OF ABU DAWUD [10]**

Because the prescribed treatment of the wife, including wife beating is important in an Islamic marriage, this collection of Abu Dawud's Hadith contains a small chapter dedicated to wife beating.

## **CHAPTER 709 - ON BEATING WOMEN**

**#2141 -** Iyas Dhubab reported the apostle of Allah as saying:

"Do not beat Allah's handmaidens", but when Umar came to the apostle of Allah and said: "Women have become emboldened towards their husbands", he (the prophet), gave permission to beat them. Then many women came round the family of the apostle of Allah complaining against their husbands. So the apostle of Allah said, "Many women have gone round Muhammad's family complaining against their husbands. They are not the best among you".

Note here that Muhammad commented on the women who were complaining to his wives: "they are not the best among you". Muhammad was not commenting on the husbands who beat their wives.

**#2142 -** Umar reported the prophet as saying: "A man will not be asked as to why he beat his wife".

Abu Dawud's notes on 2141 are: "This shows that wives should obey their husbands...". On 2142: "This means that a man tries his best to correct his wife, but he fails to do so, he is allowed to beat her as a last resort. This tradition never means that a husband should beat his wife without any valid reason".

## **AISHA – MUHAMMAD'S WIFE**

Being Muhammad's wife had many great advantages. However, even Aisha and Hafsa (two of Muhammad's wives) were physically disciplined. Note that in each case when Aisha was struck she was married to Muhammad and she was probably younger than 16 years old.

### **SAHIH MUSLIM Book 004, #2127:**

...When it was my turn for Allah's Messenger to spend the night with me, he turned his side, put on his mantle and took off his shoes and placed them near his feet, and spread the corner of his shawl on his bed and then lay down till he thought that I had gone to sleep. He took hold of his mantle slowly and put on the shoes slowly, and opened the door and went out and then closed it lightly. I covered my head, put on my veil and tightened my waist wrapper, and then went out following his steps till he reached Baqi'. He stood there and he stood for a long time. He then lifted his hands three times, and then returned and I also returned. He hastened his steps and I also hastened my steps. He ran and I too ran. He came (to the house) and I also came (to the house). I, however, preceded him and I entered (the house), and as I lay down in the bed, he (the Holy Prophet) entered



the (house), and said: Why is it, O 'Aisha, that you are out of breath? I said: There is nothing. He said: Tell me or the Subtle and the Aware would inform me. I said: Messenger of Allah, may my father and mother be ransom for you, and then I told him (the whole story). He said: Was it the darkness (of your shadow) that I saw in front of me? I said: Yes. He struck me on the chest which caused me pain, and then said: Did you think that Allah and His Apostle would deal unjustly with you?...

#### COMMENT

In this Hadith Muhammad chest-slapped Aisha and “caused her pain”. In my opinion, this action is not “wife beating” in the strictest sense. However, it shows that a woman can be struck under the certain circumstances. Muhammad’s ego was challenged, and he was probably frightened by seeing her shadow late at night, so, in his anger, he struck Aisha.

#### **SAHIH MUSLIM Book 009, #3506:**

Jabir b. 'Abdullah reported: Abu Bakr came and sought permission to see Allah's Messenger. He found people sitting at his door and none amongst them had been granted permission, but it was granted to Abu Bakr and he went in. Then came 'Umar and he sought permission and it was granted to him, and he found Allah's Apostle sitting sad and silent with his wives around him. He (Hadrat 'Umar) said: I would say something which would make the Holy Prophet laugh, so he said: Messenger of Allah, I wish you had seen (the treatment meted out to) the daughter of Kharija when she asked me some money, and I got up and slapped her on her neck. Allah's Messenger laughed and said: They are around me as you see, asking for extra money. Abu Bakr then got up went to 'Aisha and slapped her on the neck, and 'Umar stood up before Hafsa and slapped her saying: You ask Allah's Messenger which he does not possess. They said: By Allah, we do not ask Allah's Messenger for anything he does not possess....

#### COMMENT

The context in this Hadith was that Muhammad had been very upset for his wives. He almost divorced them all. While he was upset, his closest friends came to cheer him up. Umar mentioned that he had slapped his wife because she wanted more money than he felt he could give her. Muhammad laughed when he heard about her being slapped. Then he pointed out his wives’ demands for more money. As a result, both fathers slapped their respective daughters. So in this case Muhammad didn’t strike his wives, but he had others do it for him, making him just as culpable.

#### **SAHIH BUKHARI VOL. 8 #828**

Narrated Aisha: Abu Bakr came to towards me and struck me violently with his fist and said, "You have detained the people because of your necklace." But I remained motionless as if I was dead lest I should awake Allah's Apostle although that hit was very painful.

## COMMENT

The context for this Hadith is that Muhammad delayed breaking of camp to search for Aisha's necklace. This made things hard for his followers because there was not much water. In his anger, Abu Bakr, Aisha's father, struck her violently with his fist. Muhammad was asleep next to her, with his head resting on her legs or side. While this is not "wife beating", it illustrates the degraded position of Muslim women.

### **SAHIH BUKHARI Vol. 7, #132**

"Narrated Zam'a, "The prophet said, "None of you should flog his wife as he flogs a slave and then have sexual intercourse with her in the last part of the day.""

Here, Muhammad does not forbid wife beating, rather, he didn't want them severely beaten as Muslim's slaves could be beaten.

These Hadith give us glimpses of early Islamic life. They show us how women were thought of, and how they were treated. Later Islamic scholars were able to draw from these stories and develop an Islamic system of life. Women were the losers in this. But, what the scholars, and Muslim leaders did was accurate, based upon the Hadith. If wives were beaten with Muhammad's approval, then that practice should continue today. Muslim women today are placed in the same position that Riffa's wife and the slapped women are placed in: submit or be physically punished.

---

## **4) THE BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL (SIRA) RELATED TO WIFE BEATING**

### **MUHAMMAD'S FAREWELL ADDRESS**

Shortly before he died as a result of poisoning by a Jewish woman, (<http://answering-islam.org/Silas/mo-death.htm>), Muhammad addressed a crowd of Muslims in Mecca. He commented on several issues, including the treatment of women. Here is the pertinent quote. It is taken from **Ibn Ishaq's "Sirat Rasulallah", Guillaume's translation [11]**, page 651:

"You have rights over your wives, and they have rights over you. You have the right that they should not defile your bed and that they should not behave with open unseemliness. If they do, God allows you to put them in separate rooms and to beat them, but not with severity. If they refrain from these things and obey you, they have right to their food and clothing with kindness. Lay injunctions on women kindly, for they are your wards having no control of their persons."

Note here that

- 1) The Islamic definition of "ward" means a person who has been legally placed under the care of a guardian or court, or a person who is under the protection and control of another. In other words, Muslim wives are placed under their husband.
- 2) Women are to be cared for just like a man cares for a prized horse.
- 3) The Muslim writer/scholar Ali Dashti, in his book, "23 Years, a Study of the Prophetic Career of Muhammad" [12], translates the fourth sentence from the above passage as **"Look after women kindly! They are prisoners, not having control of themselves at all". The passage's word in Arabic "awan" translated as "ward" or "prisoners" implies that women are in-between slave and free.** In other words, because women are unable control their emotions, men are given authority over them.

Like the Hadith, the Sira provide important anecdotes on the subject of wife beating. This quote above has been used many times by various writers. This is because Muhammad defined a woman's social status "They are prisoners, not having control of themselves at all", and allowed them to be beaten as discipline – much in the same way a man would spank a child.

---

## 5) ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING – THE SCHOLARS

What follows are quotes from some of the greatest scholars in Islamic history on the subject of wife beating.

### **IBN KATHIR [13]**

Ibn Kathir is one of the distinguished Islamic scholars. His commentary (tafseer) is a favorite of Sunni Muslims. Excerpts from his commentary on Islamic wife beating – 4:34 follow. The quote is very long, but it is of great value in describing how the woman is placed in Islam, and the justification for her husband to beat her. Because of his detail, I felt it necessary to include his entire set of relevant comments. I quote from pages 50 through 53.

“In this verse Allah says that the man is the leader over the woman and is the one who disciplines her if she does wrong. **“Because Allah has made one of them excel the other”**, this is because men are better than women, and a man is better than a woman. Therefore, prophethood and great kingship were confined to men, as the Prophet said, “A people that choose a woman as their leader will not succeed.” This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari. Added to that positions such as the judiciary, etc,... “And because they spend from their means.” Here, Allah refers to the dowry and expenses, which Allah has prescribed in the Quran and Sunnah; and given a man is better than a woman, it is

appropriate that he be her protector and maintainer, as Allah says: **“But men have a degree over them.”** 2:228

Therefore, a woman should obey her husband in what Allah has commanded her with regards to his obedience and Allah’s obedience. She should be kind towards his family, protective of his wealth. The statement was also held by Muqatil, As-Sudiy and Adh-Dhahhak.

On the authority of Ali, Ibn Mardawaih narrated: “A man from al-Ansar came with a woman to the Prophet, then the woman said: “O Allah’s messenger! Her husband who was known as so and so from al-Ansar had hit her and that had affected her face.” The Prophet replied: “He should not have done that.” Then, the verse, **“men are the protectors and maintainers of women”**, as far as discipline is concerned, was revealed. Therefore, the Prophet said, “You wanted something and Allah wanted something else.””

“Because Allah has made one of them excel the other and because they spend from their means.” Ash-Sha’bi stated that this excellence refers to the bridal money; for if the husband reprimands her, he shall not be punished and if she reprimands him, she will be lashed. **“Therefore the righteous among women, are devoutly obedient”** to their husbands. **“And guard in the husband’s absence”** her honor and his wealth. “What Allah orders them to guard.” This part of the verse means that the guarded is he whom Allah has guarded.

Quoting Abu Hurairah, Ibn Jarir narrated: “The Prophet said: “The best among women are the ones who pleases you when you look at her, obeys you when you give her an order and guards herself and your wealth during your absence.” Then the Prophet recited: **“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women...”**”

**“As to those women on whose part you see misconduct (nushuzhunna).”** The reference is made to those who show disobedience. It is said that a nashiza – from the verb nashaza = to disobey – is a woman who disobeys her husband’s order, opposes and dislikes him. Therefore, if a husband feels the signs of her disobedience, he should give her advice, threaten her with Allah’s Punishment for her disobedience to her husband. This is because Allah has prescribed that a wife has a duty towards her husband and she should obey him, and that it is unlawful for her to disobey him due to his excellence. The Prophet said in this context: “If I were to order one to prostrate to another, I would order a women to prostrate to her husband due to the greatness of her duty towards him.”

**“Refuse to share their beds.”** Ibn Abbas said: “A man should advise her if she accepts. Otherwise, he should refuse to share their bed.” Quoting Ibn Abbas, “Sharing the bed means: a man should not have sexual intercourse with his wife, and should turn his back on her in bed. Quoting Muawiyyah Ibn Hida al-Qushairi, it is narrated in the books of Sunan (Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, etc...) and Musnad: “O Allah Messenger! What is a man’s duty towards his wife?” The Prophet replied: “Feed her when you feed

yourself, buy her clothes when you buy yourself clothes, do not hit her in the face, do not scold and do not desert her except in the house.””

“**And beat them.**” If they do not abstain from their disobedience through both advice and desertion. However, the beating should be *dharbun ghayru nubrah*, i.e. light, according to the Hadith narrated in Sahih Muslim, on the authority of Jabir, who had quoted the Prophet as saying in his farewell pilgrimage: “And fear Allah in women, for they are your aides, and their duties towards you is that your beds should not be shared with someone you dislike. Therefore, if they disobey you, beat them lightly, and your duty towards them is that you should maintain and buy them clothes in a reasonable manner.”

Scholars said: *dharbun ghayru nubrah* means: The husband should beat his wife lightly, in a way which does not result in breaking one of her limbs or affecting her badly.

“But if they obey, seek not against them means (of annoyance).” If a woman obeys her husband in all what he wants from her, as long as within the boundaries of what is lawful, he should not beat nor desert her.”

END OF IBN KATHIR QUOTE

## COMMENT

1) Kathir states that "nushuz" is made to those who show "disobedience". Some Muslims believe that "nushuz" relates only to sexual misconduct. Clearly, that position is incorrect. It has all to do with the wife persistently disobeying the husband. Notice Kathir's statement, "because of his excellence"? This is tied to "men are superior to women".

2) He states that the beating should be light. Define a "light" beating. He cites from Muhammad's farewell address. He adds, "The husband should beat his wife lightly, in a way which does not result in breaking one of her limbs or affecting her badly."

I totally agree with him. The beating should never break bones. "Affecting her badly" means that she is not to be severely injured. Previously, we saw that Muhammad allowed a woman to be slapped in the face, and another woman bruised. Another Muslim was known to "not take the stick off his shoulder" and as a "great beater of women". Consequently a Muslim man can strike his disobedient wife, bruise her, and cause her pain.

3) Another interesting point: Ibn Kathir notes the Hadith in which a man slapped his wife's face. The translator of Ibn Kathir notes that this Hadith does not have a "muttasil sanad". However, this does not mean that the Hadith is false, only that the isnaad is incomplete. Obviously Ibn Kathir thought it was true. It is the only background of 4:34 that I am aware of.

## AL-NAWAWI [14]

Nawawi is one of the great Islamic jurisprudence scholars. He was a 13<sup>th</sup> century Shafi'i scholar. His work was used by Ahmad Naqib in writing "Reliance of the Traveller". This book is a "Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law". From the section m10.12, "Dealing with a Rebellious Wife", page 540,

**"When a husband notices signs of rebelliousness in his wife (nushuz), whether in words, as when she answers him coldly when she used to do so politely, or he asks her to come to bed and she refuses, contrary to her usual habit; or whether in acts, as when he finds her averse to him when she was previously kind and cheerful),** he warns her in words (without keeping from her or hitting her, for it may be that she has an excuse. The warning could be to tell her, "fear Allah concerning the rights you owe to me," or it could be to explain that rebelliousness nullifies his obligation to support her and give her a turn amongst other wives, or it could be to inform her, **"Your obeying me is religiously obligatory"**). If she commits rebelliousness, he keeps from sleeping (and having sex) with her without words, and may hit her, but not in a way that injures her, meaning he may not (bruise her), break bones, wound her, or cause blood to flow. (It is unlawful to strike another's face.) He may hit her whether she is rebellious only once or whether more than once, though a weaker opinion holds that he may not hit her unless there is repeated rebelliousness."

If the wife does not fulfill one of the above-mentioned obligations, she is termed "rebellious" (nashiz), and the husband takes the following steps to correct matters:

- (a) admonition and advice, by explaining the unlawfulness of rebellion, its harmful effect on married life, and by listening to her viewpoint on the matter;
- (b) if admonition is ineffectual, he keeps from her by not sleeping in bed with her, by which both learn the degree to which they need each other;
- (c) if keeping from her is ineffectual, it is permissible for him to hit her if he believes that hitting her will bring her back to the right path, though if he does not think so, it is not permissible. His hitting her may not be in a way that injures her, and is his last recourse to save the family.
- (d) if the disagreement does not end after all this, each partner chooses an arbitrator to solve the dispute by settlement, or divorce.

END OF QUOTE

### COMMENT

The only exception I take with this text concerns "bruise her". People can bruise very easily. And bruises occur after the fact. Hadith show that a woman was bruised,

and it was acceptable to Muhammad. On the other hand, I certainly agree that Muhammad taught to break no bones, cause no wounds, and shed no blood.

Note that it is permissible for the husband to beat his wife if she has a bad attitude towards him. “Rebellion” is determined by the husband. His standards apply to her. If his standards change, she will have to change accordingly. And, since they are more or less individual standards of obedience, they will vary from man to man. Notice how this right – the right of judging rebellion, places the husband in such a powerful, superior position? He evaluates the woman’s attitudes and actions, makes a judgement, and executes his sentence. Husband and wife do not always communicate clearly. He could make wrong decisions or commit errors in judgement. He could operate out of misguided emotion; he could abuse the woman over a misunderstanding.

### **FATIMA MERNISSI [15]**

Fatima Mernissi is a feminist Muslim. She is not considered an Islamic scholar. I’ve included quotes from her here because she quotes from famous Islamic scholars. She is somewhat unpopular in the Islamic world because she criticizes what she sees. She has written several good books on the oppression of Muslim women under the state of Islam today. She believes that originally, Islam treated women much better than they are treated today. There is some truth to that. However, Mernissi has overlooked many of the Hadith that deal with the relegated position of women in Islam. Like most people who challenge and break from their cultures and faiths, she has a hard time making a clean break by laying part of the blame of female oppression on the oppressive Islamic system.

Here are a set of quotes related to the degradation of women and Islamic wife beating from her book, “The Veil and the Male Elite”.

Commenting on 4:34, p155, she writes: **“If we continue the reading of this verse, we realize that it sanctifies the right of men to strike their wives in case of “nushuz” – that is, rebellion against male authority: ...**

Here Mernissi agrees with the correct understanding of “nushuz”, i.e. persistent disobedience against the male authority. Mernissi provides a valuable quote from Tabari on the definition of “nushuz”:

**“Al-nushuz means that the wife treats her husband with arrogance, refuses to join him in the marital bed; it is an expression of disobedience [al-may’siya] and an obvious unwillingness to any longer carry out what obedience to the husband requires. It is a way of showing hatred [bughd] and opposition [I’rad] to the husband.”**

She continues, “During a violent dispute an Ansari man slapped his wife. The injured woman hurried to the prophet and demanded that he, as hakam (that is, arbiter in the legal sense), apply the law of retaliation, and that he take action on the spot. Muhammad was

preparing to make his decision to fulfill her request when the verse was revealed. God had decided otherwise. ... "I wanted one thing, and God wanted another."

Here she uses the Hadith in which the wife is slapped and her face is marked. Obviously, it had enough validity for Mernissi to use. It is the only story I know of that provides the contextual background for 4:34.

She also comments on Muhammad not striking his wives when he was angry at them. If Mernissi would have looked a bit closer at the Hadith of Muslim, she would have found that, as previously noted, Muhammad allowed others to strike his wives. Muhammad gets no points there. If anything, he loses points because he was not man enough to do what Allah instructed Muslims to do – beat rebellious women.

Finally, Mernissi furnishes another quote from Tabari on 4:34:

"The verse is saying that "Men are in charge of women" means that they can discipline them, put them in their place when it comes to their duties toward God and toward their husband, and this is because Allah has given authority to some of you over others." **The authority, he tells us, results from the sadaq (dowry) that men pay to their wives when the marriage contract is concluded... it is because they spend their wealth on them that men have authority over women. but although all the experts cited agree on men's supremacy over women,** there is no unanimity on the extent of that power, particularly when it is a question of nushuz, rebellion in the matter of sex. Mernissi states that Tabari believed that "banish them to their bed" meant to tie the woman up in the bed!

What the quotes from the Islamic scholars portray is how women are viewed in Islam historically. Their scholarship has analyzed the early Islamic writings on the issue, and they have taught accordingly. For the most part, all of the great, early Islamic scholars agreed on the issues related to wife beating. The big picture that they paint is of a woman being subjugated to the man and obedience is due him.

---

## 6) OTHER ISLAMIC WRITINGS

### "WOMEN IN ISLAM [16]"

In the Islamic publication, "Women in Islam", published by the Islamic Publications in Lahore Pakistan it also states the reasons and justification for Islamic wife beating, page 35:

"The family life should be harmonious. If anything goes wrong and there is any misunderstanding four steps are to be taken to deal with such a situation: 1) verbal



advice and admonitions, 2) then the family relation is to be suspended, 3) after that slight physical correction (beating slightly) may be administered and the fourth is a family council to settle the differences if there is any."

On page 36, the book further elaborates: "If she still resists, then he is to administer a slight physical correction. He is to scourge her. When he flogs her, he should remember that he is beating his own wife. He should not beat her when he is angry; whatever the cause of his anger could be. The flogging must never leave any marks on her. It should be slight and not very painful."

I want to again note here that Muslim apologists always say that the beating should be 'light'. But, in the context, it has to be severe enough to bring her into obedience. And it must produce a stronger psychological effect that verbal chastisement and sexual desertion produce. In other words - it's got to hurt. But the husband is not to whip her like a slave, or severely injure the wife.

### **"YOU ASK AND ISLAM ANSWERS [17]"**

In the Islamic publication "You Ask and Islam Answers", page 94, Abdul Mushtahiri says, "If admonishing and sexual desertion fail to bring forth results and the woman is of a cold and stubborn type, the Quran bestows on man the right to straighten her out by way of punishment and beating provided he does not break her bones nor shed blood. Many a wife belongs to this querulous type and requires this sort of punishment to bring her to her senses." (Quoted from "Beyond the Veil", p79.

### **"THE ISLAMIC WEB SITE <http://www.aol40.com/beating.htm> [18]**

**Below are several quotes that the Muslim author wrote regarding Islamic wife beating. The large red font is from on the site's article.**

a) "The point however is, Noble Verses 4:34-36 should not be a concern for any Muslim woman, because a good woman should not intentionally disobey her husband in what Allah Almighty has permitted for him upon her and would not flirt with any man from the first place! So on the third time after the prior 2 warnings, she definitely needs some disciplinary measures be taken against her."

b) **"The husband is like a "god" to his wife. Wives need to always honor and respect their husbands:**

c) "It is important to know that according to Islam, the husband should always be honored and respected in his home as if he were "god". It is important for the wife to realize this fact very well. Stubborn wives have no place in Islam:"

d) "Narrated Qays ibn Sa'd: "I went to al-Hirah and saw them (the people) prostrating themselves before a satrap of theirs, so I said: The Apostle of Allah

(peace\_be\_upon\_him) has most right to have prostration made before him. When I came to the Prophet (peace\_be\_upon\_him), I said: I went to al-Hirah and saw them prostrating themselves before a satrap of theirs, but you have most right, Apostle of Allah, to have (people) prostrating themselves before you. He said: Tell me , if you were to pass my grave, would you prostrate yourself before it? I said: No. He then said: Do not do so. **If I were to command anyone to make prostration before another I would command women to prostrate themselves before their husbands**, because of the special right over them given to husbands by Allah. (Translation of Sunan Abu-Dawud, Marriage (Kitab Al-Nikah), Book 11, Number 2135)'''

e) "The wife is responsible for pleasing her husband and making sure that he is always satisfied. It is her Islamic duty!"

f) "It is also important for the wives to know that according to Islam, their husbands are like their "gods". If bowing down to other than Allah Almighty in worship was not prohibited in Islam, Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him would've ordered the women to bow down to their husbands."

g) "The only time Islam allows a husband to beat his wife is when she intentionally disobeys her husband in what Allah Almighty has permitted for him upon her or when she flirts or show disloyalty for the third time."

## COMMENT

There are a few points I want to make from the above quotes.

#1. The Islamic author agrees with me on the pretext of Islamic wife beating: the wife's disobedience to her husband. (quotes a & g).

#2. The Islamic author also emphasizes the man's superior position over the wife. He quotes Hadith that state that Muhammad would have ordered women to prostrate down to their husbands. Why? Because Allah has given them special rights over the females. The inferior bows to the superior. The author adds that Muslim men are like "gods" over their wives, i.e., they rule over them, they are to be served. (quotes b, c, & f).

---

## 7) DAMAGE DUE TO WIFE BEATING

### PHYSICAL DAMAGE

There is no need to elaborate on the physical damage that can be done to woman because of being beaten. Suffice it to say that there will be bodily harm done from small bruises to welts to injuries to broken bones.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE

A number of medical studies prove that not only is a women physically damaged by being beaten but she suffers from psychological damage as well. And while the bruises of the beating disappear after a few weeks, the psychological damage lasts for years and leaves deeper scars. Here are some excerpts.

1) **"Battered", By Parker, Veronica F [19]**

Citation: RN, v58n1, pp.26-29, Jan 1995

Number:02211876 Features: References; Illustration Copyright: Copyright

Medical Economics Publishing Inc. 1995

"Physical manifestations of abuse range from minor, temporary bruising to permanent impairment and death. But while battering occasionally leaves no scars and few physical symptoms, it almost always causes psychological distress. Researchers have identified low self-esteem, poor self-image, and a propensity to anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic illness as characteristics common to victims of domestic violence."

2) **"Female victims of spousal violence": [20]**

Subject(s): WOMEN -- Crimes against; NATIONAL Family Violence Survey, 1985

Source: Family Relations, Jan96, Vol. 45 Issue 1, p98, 9p, 2 charts, 2 diagrams

Author(s): DeMaris, Alfred; Swinford, Steven

ISSN: 0197-6664

### FEMALE VICTIMS OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE: FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR LEVEL OF FEARFULNESS

This study employed data from the 1985 National Family Violence Survey to explore the predictors of fear about future abuse among 356 married or cohabiting women whose partners had previously abused them. We found that fear was higher among women whose partners had initiated the violence or who had subjected them to forced sex, or women who felt that their own use of violence would result in disastrous consequences for them. Unexpectedly, having enlisted the help of shelters, lawyers, or

therapists was related to greater fear. Accounting for fear at more than one point in time may explain these findings.

One of the more insidious aspects of family violence is the climate of fear that is created for those who are victimized by it. Regardless of whether the violence has been relatively minor, or more severe, relatively infrequent or more routine, the fear that it will reoccur is an ever-present reality.

3) **“Transition shelters have positive impact on psychological health.” [21]**

Subject(s): FAMILY violence -- Psychological aspects; ABUSED women

Source: Women's Health Weekly, 08/26/96-09/02/96 Issue N, p13, 2p

Author(s): Marble, Michelle

**TRANSITION SHELTERS HAVE POSITIVE IMPACT ON PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH**

“Low levels of self-esteem, an externally oriented sense of control, and depression tend to be the psychological consequences of physical spousal abuse of women. Verbal abuse also contributes to decline in mental health. Physically abused women report higher incidence of this type of psychological abuse than women who are not in physically violent relationships.

Highly significant differences were observed between the groups in feeling of personal power, depression, and self-esteem. A third of the abused women were severely depressed as measured by their scores of 30 and above on the Beckman Depression Inventory, and depression scores increased with frequency and severity of abuse.”

**COMMENT**

As you will read shortly, many women in the Islamic world live in dreadful fear of being beaten by their husbands. Islam allows wife beating and it is a major social problem. There are Muslim clergy who insist it is a right in Islam to beat the disobedient wife. They feel that if wife beating is outlawed, their religious rights are violated.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

I also want to state that studies show that many children who grow up in homes where their mother is beaten grow up thinking that is acceptable behavior. Thus wife beating is fostered. Boys grow up into men thinking it is okay to knock their wife around, girls grow up thinking it is okay for them to be struck.

---

## 8) CURRENT ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING IN AMERICA

Recently, several concerned Muslims have put up a website decrying the abuse of Muslim women in America. They bring to light the wife beatings and abuse that many Muslim women in America go through. We don't hear much about it because it is kept so hush hush within the Islamic community. I welcome what these Muslims are doing: bringing out one of the uglier aspects of Islam.

Here are some relevant quotes from their webpage, found at

[http://www.stepsingtogether.org/article\\_01.html](http://www.stepsingtogether.org/article_01.html)

[22]

Although the following quote is long, I did not quote the article in full, I only used parts that were relevant to the topic of this paper. However, I encourage everyone to read the article in full.

### **Wife Abuse in the Muslim Community**

BY KAMRAN MEMON

“While North American Muslims loudly protest the widely-documented Serbian abuse of Muslim women in Bosnia, the abuse of many Muslim women at the hands of their own husbands in North America is hidden and ignored by the community.

Based on information from Muslim leaders, social workers, and activists in North America, the North American Council for Muslim Women says that approximately 10 percent of Muslim women are abused emotionally, physically, and sexually by their Muslim husbands. (There are no hard numbers, because community leaders haven't taken the well-known problem seriously enough to research.)

### FORMS OF ABUSE OF MUSLIM WOMEN

"Domestic violence is an ongoing, debilitating experience of physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse in the home," says the American Medical Association.

Although Islam promises women protection from such problems, the reality in many Muslim homes is different. The most common form of abuse is emotional and mental abuse. In Muslim homes, this includes verbal threats to divorce the wife, to remarry, or to take the kids away if she does not do exactly as she is told; intimidation and threats of

harm; degradation, humiliation, insults, ridicule, name-calling, and criticism; false accusations and blaming her for everything; ignoring, dismissing, or ridiculing her needs; neglect and the silent treatment; spying on her; telling her she is a failure and will go to hell; twisting Islamic teachings to make her feel worthless because she is a woman; restricting her access to transportation, health care, food, clothing, money, friends, or social services; physical and social isolation; extreme jealousy and possessiveness; lying, breaking promises, destroying trust; etc. Emotional abuse can take place in public or at home.

Furthermore, psychological abuse can lead to physical abuse.

Physical abuse includes pushing, shoving, choking, slapping, punching, kicking, and beating; assault with a weapon; tying up; refusing to help her when she is sick or injured; physically throwing her out of the house; etc. Physical abuse escalates in frequency and severity.

The third form of abuse is sexual abuse, involving forced, violent sex. For example, a wife may not want to have sex for health reasons, but the husband may force her anyway.

Then, if their wives dare to speak up or question their orders, these men misinterpret a Quranic verse that talks about how to treat a disobedient wife and use it as a license for abuse.

Of those who reach a breaking point and seek help, many Muslim women turn to Imams but often find them unhelpful. Imams often tell these women to be patient and pray for the abuse to end. Some imams make the abused Muslim women feel guilty, telling them they have brought the abuse upon themselves and instructing them to go home and please their husbands. Other imams, who are sincerely but mistakenly misinterpreting Islam by putting the importance of family privacy above any harm that might come to the individual woman, tell the women it is wrong for them to discuss their problems with anyone other than their husbands. The Imams's reactions stem from ignorance, cowardice, or friendship or blood relationship with the abusive husbands. Relatively few imams have had the wisdom and courage to tackle the problem head-on. As a result of this, many abused women don't bother turning to Imams for help.

END OF QUOTE

Obviously, Islamic wife beating is a problem. It is much bigger than outsiders think because many Muslim women are unwilling or unable to get help. Many Muslim women accept this abuse as Allah's will, consequently, they will not go for help because that would be a greater degree of rebellion towards their husbands and God. This is a tragic dilemma for these unfortunate women. They are trapped between an abusive husband, and a god that allows the abuse.

---

## 9) ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING IN THE REST OF THE WORLD

Probably everywhere that a large Muslim community exists, there will be a spousal abuse problem. Since women are gaining more rights and legal protection throughout the world (the Islamic Mideast and Islamic African States like Sudan and Somalia trails most of the world with regard to women's rights), Islamic spousal abuse, justified upon the Quran's teachings, are coming to the forefront.

### SPAIN

Recently, a Muslim Imam (minister), published a "how to" book on Islamic wife beating in Spain. It provoked a huge public outcry from women who have worked hard to end spousal abuse. Here is an excerpt from an article from the BBC.

"The imam writes that, to avoid serious damage, a husband should never hit his wife in a state of extreme or blind anger. He should never hit sensitive parts of the body such as the face, head, breasts or stomach. He should only hit the hands or feet using a rod that is thin and light so that it does not leave scars or bruises on the body. The husband's aim, he said, should be to cause psychological suffering and not to humiliate or physically abuse his wife.

A spokesperson for one of the groups presenting the lawsuit, the Federation for Divorced and Separated Women, said that the book was illegal under the Spanish penal code and that the imam was guilty of inciting violence against women."

### COMMENT

If inciting violence against women is illegal, they will have to outlaw the Quran!

### TURKEY

Similar to Spain, this same problem exists in Turkey as well. Fundamentalist Muslims are trying to establish the right to beat their wives are part and parcel of their faith.

I have edited non-essential comments from this article taken from Turkish news dated Aug 9, 2000:

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com/ErTDN/latest/dom.htm> [23]

**To beat, or not to beat, a woman.** Turkey has recently been witnessing a debate between the Religious Affairs Directorate and the Pious Foundation on the status of women in Islam

Ankara - Turkish Daily News

In response to the Pious Foundations's publication, "The Muslim's Handbook," which says that it is permissible to beat women, the Religious Affairs Directorate decided to publish a book to correct superstitions about the status of women in Islam.

Turkey has recently been witnessing a debate between the Religious Affairs Directorate and the Pious Foundation over women in Islam. The foundation is affiliated to the Religious Affairs Directorate. The Pious Foundation's publications came in the middle of the Religious Affairs Directorate's efforts to initiate a more modern interpretation of Islam.

The controversial "Muslim's Handbook," gave detailed on information how and on what basis a woman can be beaten by her husband. The book advises believers not to hit their women too hard. According to the book a man can keep a second wife at home under certain circumstances.

"If a woman is ill and has little children in need of care, and if her husband has financial problems and cannot afford a nurse, then he may take a second wife," the book says.

The Religious Affairs Directorate has initiated scientific research on the sources and fundamentals of superstitions about women's role in Islam. The directorate said that there is no gender distinction in Islam and that Islam does not isolate women from social life.

"The basis of implementations violating women's rights is traditional more than religious," the head of the Religious Affairs Directorate, Mehmet Nuri Yilmaz, wrote in a column in the directorate's monthly publication. "Islam does not accept housework as women's basic duty. These duties can be performed by women as they wish," Yilmaz wrote. "In the early years of Islam, women went to mosques. They sat freely with the Prophet Muhammad and asked him all kinds of question," Yilmaz added.

In the middle of this debate, the book has attracted harsh reaction from the public and from female deputies. Parliamentary Human Rights Commission Chairperson Sema Piskinsut said, "Supporting violence with moral and religious dogma is an incorrect attitude." Saying that Islam is a religion based on reconciliation, Piskinsut stated, "Islam forbids men to put pressure on women."

"The question is not just about beating women. No one has the right to hit another person. Trying to justify beating women by invoking religion is a violation of human rights. Those who claim women may be beaten by their husbands should be aware that everybody, no matter what their gender, is a human being," said Sevgi Esen, Kayseri True Path Party (DYP) deputy.



## **CURRENT ISLAMIC WIFE BEATING IN THE MIDEAST**

Below are excerpts from books or newspapers that mention or deal with Islamic wife beating.

The Guardian Weekly, a British newspaper on 23/12/1990 printed: "In 1987 an Egyptian court, following an interpretation of the Koran proposed by the Syndicate of Arab Lawyers, ruled that a husband had the duty to educate his wife and therefore the right to punish her as he wished."

Note here that with the current upswing of Islamic fundamentalism in the mid-east, a group of Muslim lawyers wanted to legally allow husbands to beat their wives. This is based on Quranic / Islamic law - Sharia. Their reasoning ties in with 4:34. Since the man is responsible for the women, he should be allowed to discipline her as he sees fit. It's the 'with responsibility comes authority' line of reasoning.

### **"THE SAUDIS"**

Islamic wife beating has been observed in the Mideast. Sandra Mackay in her book "The Saudis" [24], comments on the amount of wife beating that goes on there:

"Women survive by totally placing themselves in the hands of men. It is in this basic relationship of master and servant that a woman's physical needs are met.... Restlessness is repressed.... Obedience is security.

"The man's absolute authority over the women in his family is maintained through fear - the fear of physical brutality, the fear of economic insecurity...." (page 138).

"My translator lowered her head and quietly said that if the men found out about the women's disobedience, they would be beaten." page 139.

There are more references to wife abuse in Mackay's book.

### **"PRINCESS"**

In 1992, the book "Princess" [25] was published. The author, Jean Sasson, used the writings of a close Saudi friend of hers and penned this book. Some quotes that illustrate the subjection and physical abuse of women are:

From page 21: "Although the Koran does state that women are secondary to men...

From page 22: "The authority of the Saudi male is unlimited; his wife and child survive only if he desires. ...From an early age, the male child is taught that women are of little value: they exist only for his comfort and convenience..... Taught only the role of

master to slave, it is little wonder that by the time he is old enough to take a mate, he considers her his chattel, not his partner."

Throughout the book, there are many stories of the abuse of women. Some of these concern women being put to death, abused by their husbands, locked away in solitary confinement by their families, beaten by male family members, etc.

While "Westernized" Muslims will argue that what the Saudis are doing is cultural, not Islamic, I feel that this is either denial or ignorance on the part of Muslims living in the West. Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam. Muhammad grew up in Mecca. Saudi has been the heart of Islam ever since. I would think that if any place in the world practiced real Islam, it would be Saudi Arabia.

### **JORDAN**

From the book, "Price of Honor" [26], page 278, an excerpt from a story of a Jordanian woman.

"According to Risha, the marriage was a violent one. "If I was slow in obeying, I was beaten black and blue. My nose was broken. When my family saw me, they told me to use the beatings to get a divorce. But I was afraid of divorce; it is shameful for a woman. And he always told my family, "She's stubborn, she doesn't obey." And in the end, I would think he was right." In the first seven years of marriage Risha had several miscarriages, which she attributes to the tension she was under."

### **ON AOL**

There has been considerable discussion of wife beating (on AOL). One Muslim female described how she was continually beaten by her husband. She went to the mosque and talked to the Imams there, asking for their help in dealing with him. They did nothing to help her, they discounted her story. The beatings continued. Finally, he took a baseball bat to her. She went to the police. The husband became a fugitive. After the mosque leaders saw her bruised body they believed her.

A fellow Muslim commented that "every female I know who has had her face kicked in was married to one man". He also stated that the cases of wife abuse he knew about were ones where there was only one wife (i.e. the husband did not have additional wives).

The comments from the many Muslims on wife beating are sometimes amusing, sometimes tragic. Some said that the beating was to be done with a handkerchief. Others said it was a small twig, others said it was not to be done at all, others said it was okay to do if the man was doing it according to Islamic rules, etc.

With near 2 billion Christians, and 1 billion Muslims in the world, spousal abuse is going to occur. However, the New Testament does not command men to beat disobedient wives, the Quran does.

---

## 10) MUSLIM'S DEFENSE OF WIFE BEATING

I've spoken with Muslims from all over the world about wife beating. I've received a wide range of responses. Some of these range from, "it is no longer valid today", to, "the beating must be done with a large toothpick", to, "wife beating is okay, if done according to Islamic guidelines", to, "she can get a divorce if she doesn't like it", to, "she deserves to be beaten if she disobeys".

I want to review a couple of the responses.

### 1) **"The Quran allows her to divorce if she feels she cannot work out the relationship".**

At first glance, this sounds fine. The Western reader understands that getting a divorce is not that difficult to obtain (in the West), and almost all of the time, the wife will receive some monetary settlement. Frequently, the husband will have to contribute quite a bit of money to the wife's continued welfare.

However, in the Islamic world, the rules of divorce are quite different. Only recently, were Muslim women allowed to get a divorce in Egypt. Elsewhere it is next to impossible to obtain a divorce in a Islamic country. Those that do obtain a divorce usually fare very poorly when it comes to obtaining any finances from their husbands. The poor women either have to fend for themselves, with many of them having little or no job skills, or have to be grudgingly provided for by their relatives. And, as the Jordanian woman remarked, in Islamic society, a divorced woman is shamed. Further, she is used goods. Getting re-married will be far more challenging. How does Islam specify for a women to obtain a divorce? Well, there is no real set answer for that. Various Muslim scholars do not agree as to what the wife must do to obtain a divorce. It can take years, and, all the while, she continues to suffer abuse from her husband.

### 2) **"The Islamic system for wife beating is perfect, the real problem is that the guidelines for wife beating are not followed by the Muslim men."**

Again, at first glance this looks acceptable. "If everything were done according to the rules, then it would be fine." Well, if people were robots, this answer might be feasible. However, people are not robots. Thus, in Islam, we have women severely injured, broken bones, contusions, disfigurements, and mental depressions. Men are allowed to beat their wives for disobedience. If the man oversteps the "Islamic guidelines", the wife is damaged severely. Muhammad should have never

institutionalized wife beating. See the failure with the “Islamic system”? It is not robust enough to accommodate real life.

Examine the wide range of responses from the various Muslims. They cannot agree amongst themselves on the basic rules for wife beating... how much more will there be great variance from wife beater to wife beater!?

The fact is that people are not robots, thus, wife abuse is part and parcel in Islam. Muhammad opened up a wide avenue for the degradation of women. The Islamic system may look good on paper, but in reality, it is a failed system, and it cannot deal with real life.

---

## 11) QUESTIONS

Several questions need to be asked about the implications of 4:34, the Hadith, and Muhammad's farewell address.

- 1) Why does the Muslim "Allah" have to tell men to beat their wives before seeking family council? What was "Allah" really thinking?
  - 2) Why does “Allah” include a command to beat wives in the Quran, but does not command men to love their wives?
  - 3) What kind of foundational relationship is this establishing between a husband and wife? I believe that husbands and wives have the right to disagree, and even refuse to do certain "NON-SINFUL" actions. We each have the right to make personal choices in our lives.
  - 4) How does Muhammad's statement that women lack self-control and placing men over them effect a woman's self esteem *and* her relationship with her husband and family?
  - 5) What does 4:34 really say about women's societal position? Why does Muhammad place women under man by using the idiom meaning women are in-between slave and free?
  - 6) What is the social and psychological significance for women in the long run knowing they are physically subjected to men and can be beaten by their husbands if they begin to suspect that their wives are disobedient to them?
-

## 12) CONCLUSION

Islam establishes a wife's position with regards to her husband: he is her custodian. He takes care of her and she obeys him. If the wife persists in disobedience to her husband's requests the Quran commands husbands to beat their wives. This is a brutal way to subject women. As in Saudi and other places it causes women to become almost de-humanized. By establishing that a women is not able to control herself, placing men as 'managers' of women, and further even commanding men to beat women, women are relegated to a servant's position in life. Like a kept prized animal, women are people who are to be treated kindly, but severely disciplined when they get out of line. There is no way to justify this degrading, institutionalized, physical and psychological abuse of women allowed and commanded by Islam. Islam is not the solution, it is the problem.

---

## 13) WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP

No matter where you work or how limited your time, take a few moments to copy this list. Abuse rarely stops without outside intervention, so pass it on to people subjected to domestic violence.

There have been recent court cases in which women married to Muslim who abused them have been given protection, custody of the family, and support. Additionally, the abusers have been arrested and charged with crime. If you know of females being abused by their Muslim husbands, take action.

**Family Violence and Sexual Assault Institute 1310 Clinic Drive Tyler,**

**TX 75701 (903) 595- 6600**

**National Assault Prevention Center 606 Delsea Drive Sewell, NJ 08080**

**(908) 369-8972**

**National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence 1155 Connecticut**

**Ave., Suite 400 Washington, DC 20036 (202) 429-6695 or (800) 222-2000**

**National Institute for Violence Prevention Box 1035 Sandwich, MA 02563**

**(508) 833-0731**

---

## APPENDICES

### 14) REVIEW OF THE WORD "BEAT"

The word in the Quran in 4:34 used for "beat" is "idreb". It is a conjugate of the word "daraba" which primarily means "to beat, strike, to hit" - Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic [27], page 538. Other definitions of the word "daraba" are: "to behead, to apply a proverb to, to shoot, to shell, to make music, to sting, to separate, to impose, to cruise, to migrate, etc. "Daraba" has many more meanings, too numerous to list.

Accordingly, "daraba", or its conjugated derivatives, are used in many similar ways in the Quran, both in physically striking or in applying a proverb. Other uses /translations are "journeying".

The root of "daraba" is "darb" which means "beating, striking, hitting, shooting, bombing, coining, formation, minting, (ibid page 539).

Some Muslims assert that since this word has other meanings, depending on the context, it could also mean verbally chastise.

I agree that the context of the use of the word helps to truly determine its real meaning in the passage. Context is critical in understanding a passage. As noted the word used for the case in point is "idreb". This is the word we must focus our attention on to determine it's meaning by its use in the context of the passage. Also, we should use the Quran to interpret the Quran.

Examine the Quran's uses of "idrib". I find that it is used 12 times in the Quran. Beginning at 2:60 (Using Ali's translation)

2:60 - "strike" the rock with thy staff...

2:73 - "strike" the body

4:34 - refuse to share their beds, "beat" them...

7:160 - "strike" the rock with thy staff...

8:12 - "smite" you above their necks...

8:12 - and "smite" all their finger tips off them...

18:32 - "set forth" to them the parable

18:45 - "set forth" to them the similitude of the life

20:77 - and "strike" a dry path for them through the sea..

26:63 - "strike" the sea with thy rod

36:13 - "set forth" to them by way of a parable

38:44 - and take in thy hand a little grass and "strike"

Not counting the disputed use of "idreb" in 4:34, the word is used in two ways:

- 1) Eight times it is used in the physical action of striking
- 2) Three times it is used in the context of speaking or applying a proverb.

Clearly then, the most frequent context of the word is in physically striking.

Notice that all of the translations of the Quran translate it as "beat" or similar. None of the translations use the term related to "applying a parable". All translations use some form of physical striking.

So, what does the context of 4:34 imply?

First of all, the man has already tried the verbal approach. He has already admonished his wife, and it has failed to bring her into submission to him. Second, he has stopped sleeping with her. This means he is no longer having "relations" with her. [I wonder who is really punished more in this, the husband or the wife?]. And she is still refusing to obey her husband. So, now, if she continues in rebellion, something more drastic must occur. "Applying a parable" won't do. The verbal has already failed, and the man and woman are now deprived sexually. Since 4:34 describes a progression of stronger actions which must be followed, something stronger needs to be done according to the Quran's progression.

The next step is then "idreb". It can only be the physical "beating" meaning most frequently associated with "idreb" in the Quran. Therefore, the context in 4:34, clearly shows that "beat, flog, or scourge" is the correct translation.

---

## **15) REVIEW OF THE WORD “NUSHUZ”**

### **ON “OBEDIENCE” AS TRANSLATED**

There have been disagreements on the meaning of the Arabic word 'nushuz' for 'refractoriness', 'rebellious', or 'obedience'. Muslims wishing to abate the justification for wife beating have sought to make it allowable only in the case of wife's sexual immorality. This is not true to the record.

First, review the scholar's translations: Rodwell uses 'refractoriness', Dawood uses 'disobedience', Pickthall uses 'rebellion', Arberry uses "rebellious", Shakir uses "desertion", and Ali uses "disloyalty and ill-conduct". It's obvious that all of these contain 'disobedience' to the husband.

The other place in the Quran where "nushuz" occurs is in 4:128. Dawood translates this verse as

"If a women fear ill-treatment or desertion on the part of her husband....."

and

In the Hans-Wehr p966, 'nushuz' is translated as "hostility, discord, violation of marital duties on the part of either the husband or wife, specifically, the recalcitrance of the woman toward her husband, and brutal treatment of the wife by the husband".

Recalcitrance means "resisting authority or control, refractory, hard to deal with or manage". Clearly, disobedience of the wife towards the husband, is within the definition of 'nushuz'. Some Muslims have maintained that "nushuz" in 4:34 only deals with sexual infidelity or inappropriate sexual behavior on the part of the wife, but from the Quran's context, and dictionary definition, there is more to it than that.

#### NUSHUZ IN CONTEXT

Take a closer look at the Quran's text. Near the middle of the verse, in each version, the justification for wife beating is laid out: "As for those from whom you fear "disobedience", (or "rebellion")". I will note that this disobedience is not one of a minor personal choice, but one of severe disregard to her husband's wishes.

Near the end of the verse, in each version, it says "then if they obey you", meaning if they are obedient. The justification for the man to beat the wife is her rebellion or disobedience. This verse means that men are to beat their wives if they persist in strident disobedience to their husbands.

If it appears from the attitude and behavior of the wife that she is not properly fulfilling the obligations and duties that fall upon her consequent to the agreement of marriage, either with respect to her husband, or to her children, he is given certain powers as head of the family to discipline and correct the manners and behavior of the wife.

The difficult issue here is that "nushuz" is determined by the husband. If he feels that she is committing "nushuz" then he can begin to take the steps of discipline, which can lead to her beating. Look carefully at 4:34. It says "as for those from whom you fear disobedience...". It is saying that the man may begin to discipline his wife based solely upon his discretion. As Muhammad said, "A man is not to be asked why he beat his wife".



---

## 16) CRITIQUE OF MUHAMMAD ASAD'S NOTES IN HIS TRANSLATION OF THE QURAN

Here are Muhammad Asad's comments on the wife beating aspects found in his translation of the Quran.

“When the above Quran verse authorizing the beating of a refractory wife was revealed, he is reported to have said: “I wanted one thing, but God has willed another thing – and what God has willed must be best (see Manar V, 74). With all this, he stipulated in his sermon on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage, shortly before his death, that the beating should be resorted to only if the wife “has become guilty, in an obvious manner, of immoral conduct”, and that it should be done “in such a way as not to cause pain (ghayr mubarrih)”; authentic Traditions to this effect are found in Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Daud, Nasai and Ibn Majah. On the basis of these Traditions, all the authorities stress that this beating, if resorted to at all, should be more or less symbolic – “with a toothbrush, or some such thing” (Tabari, quoting the views of scholars of the earliest times), or even “with a folded handkerchief” (Razi); and some of the greatest Muslim scholars (e.g. Ash-Shafii) are of the opinion that it is just barely permissible, and should preferably be avoided: and they justify this opinion by the prophet's personal feelings with regard to this problem.” [28]

END OF QUOTE

Asad is a fairly recent writer. Like Yusef Ali, he wrote with a Western readership in mind. Consequently, like Ali, he skews his translation of the Quran to be more acceptable to the educated, moral, Western reader.

In examination Asad's commentary has Problems. Asad forces Muhammad's words from his farewell pilgrimage onto 4:34. If Asad were truly familiar with the sources on wife beating he would know that wife beating can be done for BOTH immoral sexual conduct and persistent disobedience. There is no justification for forcing one context upon another.

His next error is that he translates ghayr mubarrih as “not to cause pain”. Guillaume translates it as “not severely”. How do you beat someone without causing them pain? The two concepts do not go together. If I beat you, it will hurt, otherwise it is not a beating.

He then quotes the “symbolic”, “toothbrush” and “handkerchief” comments. The Islamic sources all show that in the days of early Islam wife beating was painful and done with the hand and perhaps even a stick.

Muhammad didn't like wife beating, and didn't beat his own wives, but he approved of it. He did chest slap Aisha – but perhaps in Islamic thought that does not

qualify as a beating. Since he frequently got people to do his dirty work for him, when problems with his wives arose, he allowed Umar and Abu Bakr to slap their daughters. Muhammad didn't beat his wives; he had others do it for him. Obviously he didn't detest it that much.

---

## 17) REFERENCES

1. Rodwell, J. M., "The Koran", Everyman, London
2. Dawood, N. J., "The Koran", Penguin, London, 1995
3. Pickthall, M., "The Meaning of the Glorious Koran", Mentor, New York, 1953
4. Arberry, A. J., "The Koran", Oxford, 1983
5. Shakir, M. H., "The Quran", Tahrike Tarsile Quran, Inc., Elmhurst, NY, 1993
6. Ali, Abdullah Yusef, "The Quran", Tahrike Tarsile Quran, Inc., Elmhurst, NY, 1997
7. "Beyond the Veil", available from VOM, 918-337-8015
8. Bukhari, Muhammad, "Sahih Bukhari", Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, India, 1987, translated by M. Khan
9. Muslim, Abu'l-Husain, "Sahih Muslim", International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1971, translated by A. Siddiqi,
10. Abu Dawud, Suliman, "Sunan", al-Madina, New Delhi, 1985, translated by A. Hasan
11. Guillaume, A., "The Life of Muhammad", Oxford, 1955
12. Dashti, Ali, "23 Years: A Study in the Prophetic Career of Mohammad", Mazda, Costa Mesa, CA, 1994
13. Kathir, Ibn, "Tafsir of Ibn Kathir", Al-Firdous Ltd., London, 2000
14. Misri, Ahmad, "Reliance of the Traveler", Amana, Beltsville, MD, 1994
15. Mernissi, Fatima, "The Veil and the Male Elite", Perseus, Reading, MA, 1991
16. Hatimy, Said, "Women in Islam", Islamic Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 1991

17. "You Ask and Islam Answers", page 94, Abdul Mushtahiri,
18. <http://www.aol40.com/beating.htm>
19. "Battered", By Parker, Veronica F, Citation: RN, v58n1, pp.26-29, Jan 1995, Medical Economics Publishing Inc. 1995
20. Swinford, Steven, "Female victims of spousal violence", Family Relations, Jan96, Vol. 45 Issue 1, p98
21. Marble, Michell, "Transition shelters have positive impact on psychological health"
21. Women's Health Weekly, 08/26/96-09/02/96 Issue N, p13
22. [http://www.stepsingtogether.org/article\\_01.html](http://www.stepsingtogether.org/article_01.html) Article on Islamic wife beating in America
23. <http://www.turkishdailynews.com/ErTDN/latest/dom.htm> Article on Book dealing with wife beating
24. Mackay, Sandra, "The Saudis", Signet, New York, 1990
25. Sasson, Jean, "Princess", William Morrow and Co, 1992
26. Goodwin, Jan, "Price of Honor", Plume, (Penguin), New York, 1995
27. Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Spoken Language Services, Ithaca, NY, 1976
28. Asad, M., "The Message of the Quran", Dar al-Andalus, Gilbralter, 1980