

## Wife Beating in Islam:



Saudi news presenter Rania al-Baz in hospital after the beating from her husband in 2004. Photo: Getty

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/saudi/story/0,11599,1585123,00.html>

# A Rebuttal of Badawi's "Wife Beating"

by [Silas](#)

Islam is rightly criticized because the Quran commands men to beat disobedient wives. Allah commands men to beat their wives if they continue to be rebellious to their husbands. Accordingly this aspect of Islam has come under censure because it allows a man to physically assault his wife.

Muslim apologists like Baidawi seek to do spin control. Badawi seeks to improve the image of Islam rather than reveal the truth. After all, they don't want Islam to be seen as denigrating to women, especially in the West. That would scare away potential converts. As a result, a number of attempts have been made by Muslim apologists to soften the Quran's stance, or to portray it in a different light.

In this rebuttal, I examine Badawi's apologetic and compare it against a number of traditions (Hadith) and other Islamic writings. I want to bring to light Islam's true position on wife beating. It is, as we shall see, somewhat more severe than Badawi and other Muslims are willing to admit publicly. I don't blame them for being ashamed; legalized wife beating is a blight on society.

Baidawi wrote:

<<<There are cases, however, in which a wife persists in deliberate mistreatment and expresses contempt of her husband and disregard for her marital obligations. Instead of divorce, the husband may resort to another measure that may save the marriage, at least in some cases.>>>

I question Baidawi's logic here. The issue at hand is not saving the marriage, the issue is bringing the wife into obedience in a way that pleases her husband. If he chooses to divorce her because of her disobedience, or chooses to bear with it is another issue. A husband is free to divorce his wife even if she is not disobedient. A wife may be pleasing to her husband in many areas, but disobey him in one. He may wish to put up with her disobedience, even after a beating, and not divorce her. **The wife isn't beaten to save the marriage, the wife is beaten to bring her into obedience to the man.**

**Further, since when does wife beating save marriages? Usually, it destroys them.** Most women who have been beaten feel a sense of degradation. I know of no cases where a mature adult woman, who has been beaten by her husband, is grateful for the bruises and humiliation.

Baidawi wrote:

<<<Such a measure is more accurately described as a gentle tap on the body, but NEVER ON THE FACE, making it more of a symbolic measure than a punitive one.>>>

Again Baidawi misses the mark. A "beating" is not a "gentle tap" on the body. A beating is a painful, degrading, experience. He states that since the wife is not to be struck on the face, the beating is symbolic rather than punitive. Does Baidawi have any idea of what a beating can constitute? Just a little common sense and experience teaches us that a person can receive a very painful beating without ever being struck in the face. Many people have died from such beatings. Bruises on the body can be very agonizing and a severe beating on the body can do lasting damage. A person doesn't need to be struck in the face to receive a painful beating.

Baidawi is also incorrect about the scope of the wife beating. Islamic wife beating may have not been on the face, but it was certainly was physical, and it was meant to hurt the wife. Look at it from another perspective: If the wife is already in rebellion to her husband, a "gentle tap" is not going to change her attitude. At that point she would probably laugh in his face.

<<<Following is the related Qur'anic text:

**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 whose part you**

**fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) do not share their beds, (and last) beat (tap) them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all). (4:34)>>>**

Here Badawi uses a modified Quranic text. Look at all of the word insertions enclosed by ( ) parenthesis. This verse is from Ali's translation of the Quran, a translation written with the Western reader in mind. Ali inserted words designed to make Islam more palatable to the Western reader. Like Badawi, he didn't want the truth about Islam and wife beating to be understood properly.

Here are some of Ali's insertions into the Quranic text: "strength", "tap", "lightly", "of annoyance". All of these words are meant to shade the true meaning of the Quran. In these cases, the true meaning of the Arabic words are deliberately obscured.

Let's examine the word used for "beat". Ali and Badawi would like us to believe that it really means "tap", instead of the more brutal word of "beat". But as I will show, "beat" is clearly the correct translation.

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, page 538.

The Arabic word "idreb" is used in two primary ways. 1) to strike up a poem, and 2) to physically "beat", or "strike" someone. **I find that "idrib" is used 12 times in the Quran. Eight times it is used in the physical action of striking**, and three times it is used in the context of speaking or applying a proverb.

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

Here is a Quranic verse in which "idreb" is used:

8:12 - ""Strike" off their heads, "strike" off the very tips of their fingers!"

**Here God is telling the angels to strike the infidels. One has to ask, is God telling His angels to "gently tap" these people?**

Now examine the context of 4:34. 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 Quranic progression.

The next step is then "idreb". **Logically, 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.** "Tapping" is just Muslim whitewash or distortion of what is really meant by the Quran.

One final and extremely important note must be made on this verse: 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.

Badawi wrote:

<<<Even here, that maximum measure is limited by the following: a. It must be seen as A RARE EXCEPTION TO THE REPEATED EXHORTATION OF MUTUAL RESPECT, KINDNESS AND GOOD TREATMENT, discussed earlier.>>>

Again, Badawi's logic fails - he distorts the context of the verse. The command to beat the wife is not a "rare exception", but the third step in a series of dealing with a disobedient wife.

Badawi wrote:

<<<b. As defined by Hadith, it is NOT PERMISSIBLE TO STRIKE ANYONE'S FACE, CAUSE ANY BODILY HARM OR EVEN BE HARSH. What the Hadith qualified as dharban ghayra mubarrih, or light striking, was interpreted by early jurists as a (symbolic) use of miswak (a small natural toothbrush)! They further qualified permissible "striking" as that which leaves no mark on the body.>>>

Badawi mentions a "miswak". He has missed his own hadith. Here are two references that prove that Islamic wife beating is physical and is supposed to do harm.

#1) "A women 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".

The above quote comes from Razi's "At-Tasfir al-Kabir" on 4:34. Razi is one of the best known Muslim scholars, I think that he knew what he was talking about.

In addition, here is a Hadith from Bukhari 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.
- 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 because they were being abused in one way or another.
- 3) The woman was badly bruised.
- 4) Muhammad did not re-prove the man for beating his wife. In fact, he reproached the woman for saying Rahman was impotent. Even though she was bruised, Muhammad accepted it and did not reprove Rahman. Clearly, this beating was acceptable to Muhammad.

Badawi wrote:

<<<It is interesting that this latter fourteen-centuries-old qualifier is the criterion used in contemporary American law to separate a light and harmless tap or strike from "abuse" in the legal sense.>>>

This statement is irrelevant because it is already shown that an Islamic wife-beating can leave bruises. What should be noted is that Islamic wife-beating is illegal in the United States. I find that interesting, a nation passes a law, superior to Quranic law, that protects women from the religious treatment permitted by "Allah" of the Quran.

Badawi wrote:

<<< This makes it clear that even this extreme, last resort, and "lesser of the two evils" measure that may save a marriage does not meet the definitions of "physical abuse," "family violence," or "wife battering" in the 20th century law in liberal democracies, where such extremes are so commonplace that they are seen as national concerns.>>>

Again Badawi is incorrect. Islamic wife beating is not the "lesser of two evils". It is an evil permitted by the Muslim's god. It is an evil legally permitted by Islamic law. Treating women as similar to animals is just plain wrong.

And Badawi is wrong about Islamic wife beating not meeting the definitions of "physical abuse", or "family violence", or "wife battering". **Clearly Islamic wife beating is physical abuse, violent, and wife battering.** I find it excellent that our society addresses spousal abuse. It is good that we track it, identify it, and judge it to be wrong. I only wish that Islamic society did likewise. However, Islamic societies do not identify it as abuse, they do not keep statistics on it, and they do not judge spousal abuse, according to 4:34 to be wrong. After all, if Allah almighty commanded men to beat disobedient wives, why should they judge or review his command?

Here is a case from Saudi Arabia. Note the institutionalized aspect of Islamic wife beating. Islamic wife beating has been observed in the Mideast. Sandra Mackay in her book "The Saudis", 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.

Badawi wrote:

<<<c. The permissibility of such symbolic expression of the seriousness of continued refraction DOES NOT IMPLY ITS DESIRABILITY. >>>

Again Badawi misses the point of 4:34. Beating the wife is commanded, and according to Islamic law desirable. If the wife will not obey her husband, then he is to beat her. It is desirable, on the part of Islam that she be brought into submission to her husband, even if it includes a harsh beating. And on this point, is Baidawi saying that one of Allah's commands are not to be followed because they are not "desirable" in his eyes?

Badawi wrote:

<<<In several ahadith, Prophet Muhammad discouraged this measure. Among his sayings are the following: "Do not beat the female servants of Allah;" "Some (women)

visited my family complaining about their husbands (beating them). These (husbands) are not the best of you;">>>

Badawi has misquoted the Hadith. It is given in the Sunan of Abu Dawud. Here is the actual quote.

#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. Muhammad had permitted husbands to beat the wives because the women became "emboldened" toward their husbands. Muhammad censured the wives for complaining about their husbands.

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".

Here is another Hadith on wife beating from Abu Dawud:

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

Does this sound like Umar is addressing a woman who was "tapped" by her husband? Of course not. Is Baidawi accusing Umar of not following the Sunnah? And if wife beating were not according to the Sunnah, why does Allah command wife beating in the Quran? Why did Muhammad permit wife beating in his farewell address? Clearly, wife beating is allowed, even commanded in Islam.

A comment on the Hadith of 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.""

Note that Muhammad did not forbid beating the wife, he only didn't want her beaten as severely as a Muslim's slaves could be beaten.

Badawi quoted:

<<<...How does anyone of you beat his wife as he beats the stallion camel and then he may embrace (sleep with) her?... (Sahih Al-Bukhari,op.cit., vol.8.hadith 68,pp.42-43).>>>

Here Muhammad is commenting on going too far in beating his the wife, and then expecting sex with her at night. He didn't dis-allow wife beating, he just didn't want the women to be beaten like rebellious animals, say with a whip or club. This is similar to the previous Bukhari Hadith. However, physical wife beating, one that causes pain, and causes bruises is allowed. It is just not allowed to beat as severe as in a slave's or animal's beating.

Badawi wrote:

<<<d. True following of the Sunnah is to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who NEVER RESORTED TO THAT MEASURE, regardless of the circumstances.>>>

This statement is absurd from an Islamic point of view. If the Quran commands wife beating, then Muslims are to obey it. Whether or not Muhammad beat his wives is irrelevant. The point is that Muhammad commanded wife beating for persistent disobedience on the wife's part.

Badawi wrote:

<<<e. Islamic teachings are universal in nature. They respond to the needs and circumstances of diverse times, cultures and circumstances. Some measures may work in some cases and cultures or with certain persons but may not be effective in others.>>>

What does this mean? It certainly sounds sweet and spiritual - "universal in nature", but what does it really mean? Is Baidawi saying the Muslim men in the West don't have to obey the Quran because it is legally and culturally wrong or that the Quran's rules don't apply in the West, or in the 20th century? Or is Badawi admitting that the West's systems of laws are superior to the Quran's and the latter are therefore abrogated? Certainly the societal laws in America are superior to Islamic laws.

Badawi wrote:

<<<by definition, a "permissible" act is neither required, encouraged or forbidden. In fact it may be BETTER TO SPELL OUT THE EXTENT of permissibility, such as in the issue at hand, rather than leaving it unrestricted and unqualified, or ignoring it all together. In the absence of strict qualifiers, persons may interpret the matter in their own way, which can lead to excesses and real abuse.>>>



Again, Badawi misunderstands the Quranic text. He calls the wife beating of 4:34 "permissible". He is wrong, it is a command. The Quran clearly outlines the steps to be taken when a husband is dealing with a rebellious wife. The third step to be taken is wife beating. Period. It is given as a command, not an option dependent upon the husband's whim. All Islam states is that the wife is not to be beaten as severely as a slave or animal. That is the extent of the beating.

Badawi wrote:

<<<f. Any excess, cruelty, family violence, or abuse committed by any "Muslim" can never be traced, honestly, to any revelatory text (Qur'an or Hadith). Such EXCESSES AND VIOLATIONS ARE TO BE BLAMED ON THE PERSON(S) HIMSELF, as it shows that they are paying lip service to Islamic teachings and injunctions and failing to follow the true Sunnah of the Prophet.>>>

According to the rules for Islamic wife beating, it is permissible to bruise the wife. If bruising the wife is considered as "spousal abuse" by U.S. law, then in fact Islam itself is to be blamed for justifying the abuse of women. Islam itself is to be judged as a religion that justifies the maltreatment of wives who are not submissive to their husbands. Islam itself is to be seen as a system of oppression for women worldwide.

## **CONCLUSION**

**Islam is very definitive about a women's position in regards to a man. The Quran commands men to beat their wives if their wives persist in disobedience to her husband's requests or orders. This is a brutal way to subject women to men's commands, and as we see in Saudi, it opened the door for 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, Islam makes women 2nd class people. Like a kept prized animal, women are people who are to 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.**