

Islam and Women: Beating Your Wives

The Muslim husband is allowed to beat his wives. This is stated in the Koran:

Chapter 4, Verse 34

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other...As to those women on whose part you see ill conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful)...

In his authoritative *tafsir*, Ibn Kathir explained that such a beating was to be neither "violent" nor "severe" (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 2, p. 446).

The *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn* explained that the husband could beat his wife, "but not hard if the other courses of action do not work" (*Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, p. 188).

The modern *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan* explained it this way:

In case a woman is disobedient, she should be counseled first to reform and mend her ways. If she does not reform, beds should be separated. This is the second step, enough for a woman of sound understanding. In case this fails to have any effect on her, then the man may thrash her providing this thrashing is not

cruel or wild, which is the wont of the ignorant and the rustic.

Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan, Vol. 1, p. 452

On the same page this modern *tafsir* also pointed out:

This verse gives two reasons for man's domination and ascendancy over woman. One is his physical strength and mental prowess, giving him distinctive superiority over woman. This is natural and inborn. The second is acquired. Allah has tasked man to earn wealth and maintain her. Woman is free from this responsibility. Because of her physique, her natural weakness, and to protect her natural modesty, woman has been kept away from the din and clatter of public life and economic activities. This verse is a clear textual evidence from the Qur'an, an absolute and incontrovertible proof, negating her right to domination, rule, or leadership.

And Muhammad himself said "to beat them [wives] but not with severity" (*The Life of Muhammad*, p. 651). And why not "with severity"? On another occasion, while giving a sermon, Muhammad said this about the treatment of women:

It is not wise for anyone of you to lash his wife like a slave, for he might sleep with her the same evening.

Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 4942

The authority to beat one's wives appeared to have been widely exercised in the early Muslim community, as Muhammad's young wife Aisha noted:

'Aishah said that the lady (came), wearing a green veil (and complained to her ('Aishah) of her husband and showed her a green spot on her skin caused by beating)...so when Allah's Messenger came, 'Aishah said, "I have not seen the women suffering as the believing [Muslim] women. Look! Her skin is greener than her clothes!"

Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 5825

And Aisha herself was also a recipient. One time, when it was her turn among the wives to have Muhammad spend the night with her, she secretly followed Muhammad when he left her bed. Aisha said that when she later confessed to Muhammad that she had followed him, "He struck me on the chest which caused me pain..." (*Sahih Muslim*, No. 974R1).

And because Muhammad was sad on one occasion, 'Umar, who became the second Caliph, used the story of slapping a woman to make Muhammad laugh. This led to the slapping of two of his wives, Aisha and Hafsa, who happened to be present, with no objections from Muhammad:

['Umar] found Allah's Apostle (SAW) sitting sad and silent with his wives around him. He (Hadrat 'Umar) said: I would say something which would make the Holy Prophet (SAW) laugh, so he said: Messenger of Allah, I wish you had seen (the treatment meted out to) the

daughter of Kharija when you asked me some money [sic], and I got up and slapped her on the neck. Allah's Messenger (SAW) laughed and said: They [Muhammad's wives] are around me as you see, asking for extra money. Abu Bakr (Allah be pleased with him) then got up, went to 'Aisha (Allah be pleased with her) and slapped her on the neck, and 'Umar stood up before Hafsa and slapped her saying: You ask Allah's Messenger (SAW) which he does not possess [sic].

Sahih Muslim, No. 1478

Beating Wives and Sharia Law

The idea of beating wives is also codified in two sections of Sharia Law in the Shafi'i school:

1. *If she commits rebelliousness, he keeps from sleeping with her without words, and may hit her, but not in a way that injures her, meaning he may not break bones, wound her, or cause blood to flow. He may hit her whether she is rebellious only once or whether more than once...*

Reliance of the Traveller, m10.12

2. *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...His hitting her may not be in a way that injures her...*

Reliance of the Traveller, m10.12 (4) (c)

And although *Reliance of the Traveller* is technically a Shafi'i manual of Sharia Law, the information in it was certified to conform "to the practice and faith of the orthodox Sunni Community" by the Islamic Research Academy of Al-Azhar University in Cairo (*Reliance of the Traveller*, p. xx).

The Hanbali school also states that a husband "is entitled to beat" his wife, but "without inflicting severe pain" (*The Mainstay Concerning Jurisprudence*, p. 223). And in that school's "Book of Oaths" (*Kitab al-Aiman*), examples are given of how oaths are to be construed. One of those examples is:

If he swears that he will surely beat his wife, with the intention of causing her pain, his oath is not kept except by a beating that causes her pain. If he swears that he will surely beat her with ten lashes, but he combines them and beats her with a single blow, his oath is not kept.

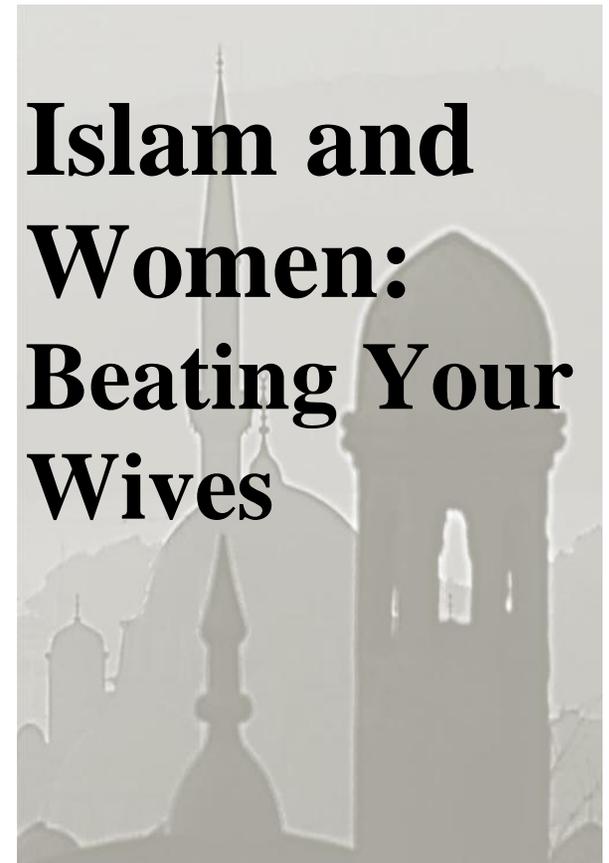
The Mainstay Concerning Jurisprudence, p. 271

Muhammad provided an apt conclusion to this brochure; he said:

A man should not be asked why he beats his wife...

Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 1986

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