

## **Domestic violence: Islamic Perspective**

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Islam, as the final message from God to humankind, came to light in a brutal and cruel environment. Violence was a common practice in Arabia and around the world at that time. The weak and needy, orphans and widows, and slaves and servants had no defined rights in such a world. Islam came to establish justice and mercy in the heart of a cruel world and prohibited any oppressive behavior. The Qur'an emphasizes that all people are created equal in worth and value regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or class. It revolutionized the status of women at the time by critically analyzing and reforming various global and local customs and traditions related to gender relations at that time. Whereas women were not even considered human beings in pre-Islamic Arabia, Islam recognized women as full human beings and equal to men before God. Chapter 4, verse 1 of the Qur'an reads,

“O mankind! reverence your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and created, of like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you), for God ever watches over you.”

One of the most grotesque abuses against females at the time was female infanticide. Men who were ashamed of their daughters buried them alive.<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an abolished this horrific act of violence. Moreover, women were considered the property of men. If a man died, for example, his brother or adult son could “inherit” the wife and take her for himself without her consent.<sup>2</sup> The Qur'an established men and women's inherent

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<sup>1</sup> Quran, 16:58 and 81:8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Recite Quran: 4:19.

equality before God, thus prohibiting such practices and illustrating instead that men and women are distinguished and honored not by their gender, race, ethnicity or socio-economic class, but only by their *taqwa*, or God-consciousness:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (Qur'an, 49:13).

Furthermore, the Qur'an considered men and women to be partners of each other. In chapter 9, verse 71, God makes it clear that men and women both have a mutual obligation to enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil. Men have no level of moral authority over women. Both men and women are obliged to keep each other on the straight path and prevent each other from going astray:

“The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another (*awliya*): they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise.”

The Qur'an not only deconstructed unjust and misogynistic practices, but offered practical and healthy alternatives for each custom. Furthermore, it provided rights for the needy, orphans, widows and slaves. Consequently, most of the first followers of Islam were among the poor, the slaves and women. Shortly, a justly balanced community evolved, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

For example, in pre-Islamic Arabia, it was considered a socially acceptable punishment for a man to kill his wife if he suspected her of having an affair.<sup>3</sup> The Qur'an prohibited this grotesque act of violence against women and introduced reforms to protect

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<sup>3</sup> Badawi, J. (1995). *Gender Equity in Islam: Basic Principles*. Plainfield, IN: American Trust Publications

the wife and those who were accused of immoral conduct by introducing less destructive ways to address the problem. Chapter 24 of the Qur'an establishes the legal procedures for the prosecution of adultery. A man's testimony against his wife is equivalent to her testimony in defense of herself. Even if a woman is lying, her testimony claiming innocence is enough to avert her punishment in Islam.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the same chapter in the Qur'an prescribes a severe punishment for men who accuse chaste women of adultery without bringing sufficient evidence (four witnesses of upright character who witnessed the act of sexual intercourse firsthand). By establishing procedural principles for the prosecution of adultery and other charges often raised against women, the Qur'an conveyed that husbands had no right to take the law into their own hands. If male witnesses could not produce sufficient evidence or if a wife denied the charges made by her husband, no punishment was enacted.

### **The Controversy Surrounding Verse 4:34**

In this context, the Qur'an also addressed how to respond to lewd conduct (*nushūz*) on the part of the wife in verse 4:34.<sup>5</sup> While this verse has been the subject of great controversy due to its use of the word *daraba*, which is mistranslated as "to beat", this verse in no way sanctions domestic violence.

In understanding this and any other Qur'anic verse, it is important to understand the sources and means of Qur'anic interpretation used by scholars. The primary means of

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<sup>4</sup> Quran, 24:8 "But it would avert the punishment from the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) By Allah, that (her husband) is telling a lie"

<sup>5</sup> "And as for those women whose ill-will (*nushūz*) you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then hit them (lightly) [*daraba*]; and if thereupon they pay you heed,<sup>5</sup> do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most High, Great! And if you have reason to fear that a breach might occur between a [married] couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people; if they both want to set things aright, God may bring about their reconciliation. Behold, God is indeed All-Knowing, Aware."<sup>5</sup>(4:34-35).

Qur'anic interpretation applied by scholars is to read the Qur'an intra-textually, known as *tafsīr al-Qur'an bil Qur'an* (allowing the Qur'an to interpret itself). Thus, it is critical to understand verse 4:34 in light of the gender paradigm of the Qur'an itself. Upon examining the countless verses governing marital relations in the Qur'an, it becomes clear that the Qur'an prescribes both partners to treat each other with respect, justice, and mercy.<sup>6</sup>

The second most important source that exegetes use to interpret the Qur'an is the example of Prophet (peace be upon him), whose life, words and actions are regarded as living commentary on the Qur'an and provide the framework within which *tafsīr* is to be exercised. This mode is known as *tafsīr bil-ma'thūr* (interpretations transmitted through Prophetic traditions, or *hadith*). When this verse is measured against the example of the Prophet, who condemned domestic violence in both deed and word, it becomes clear that this verse does not allow domestic violence, but condemns it.

There are a number of authentic *ahadith* (Prophetic traditions) in which the Prophet prohibited domestic violence. For example, the Prophet said, "Never beat God's handmaidens (female believers)."<sup>8</sup> In reference to men who use violence at home, the Prophet said, "Could any of you beat his wife as he would beat a slave, and then lie with her in the evening?"<sup>9</sup> The Prophet was known to never hit a woman or a child. Aisha is reported to have said, "The Prophet never beat any of his wives or servants; in fact, he

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<sup>6</sup> For example: "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect" (Qur'an, 30:21).

<sup>8</sup> Asad, Muhammad. (1980). *The Message of the Qur'an*. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, p. 110, footnote # 45, cited by Asad.

<sup>9</sup> Narrated in the *hadith* collections of Bukhari and Muslim.

did not strike anything with his hand except if he were to struggle in the cause of God.”<sup>10</sup> He was a man whom his wife Aisha described as having internalized the teachings of the Qur’an in his character and personality.

If the Prophet had internalized and lived the teachings of the Qur’an<sup>11</sup> and had also never raised his hand to strike any woman or child, how could the Qur’an sanction domestic violence? The Prophet was put in several situations in which he could have beaten his wives had he chosen to understand verse 4:34 as allowing a man to beat his wife. When the Prophet had serious marital disputes with his wives, he never resorted to violence under any circumstances. Instead, he gave them the option of leaving him or remaining with him, as explained in chapter 33: 28-29, “*O Prophet say to thy consorts: if it be that ye desire the life of this world and its glitter, then come, I will provide for your enjoyment and set you free in a handsome manner. But if ye seek Allah and His messenger and the hereafter, verily Allah has prepared for the well-doers amongst you a great reward.*”

This is why the contemporary researcher Abdul-Hamid Abu Sulayman notes that the most accurate understanding of the term *daraba* in verse 4:34 (often translated as ‘to beat’) is that it means to separate. After carefully analyzing all seventeen instances in which the Qur’an uses the term *daraba*, he concludes that the general connotation of the root word *daraba* in the Qur’an means to separate, to distance, to depart, to abandon and so forth.<sup>12</sup> After analyzing verse 4:34 within the overall framework of the Qur’an, Abu

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<sup>10</sup> *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 9, p. 249.

<sup>11</sup> His wife Aisha described the Prophet as a Qur’an walking on this earth.

<sup>12</sup> Abu Sulayman, Abdulhamid A. *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), pp 19.

Sulayman concludes that in this context, the Arabic word *daraba* does not mean “beat”, but rather the temporary separation of a husband from his wife.<sup>13</sup>

This understanding is supported by the Prophet’s actions as explained above. Even when the Prophet’s wife Aisha was accused of adultery by some members of the community, the Prophet never raised his hand or even his voice against his wife.<sup>14</sup> Instead, he allowed Aisha to stay at her father’s house for a month at her request, until her innocence was established by the Qur’an.<sup>15</sup> As explained earlier, when the wives of the Prophet complained about him, he gave them the option of remaining with him or leaving him.

In a historical context in which a man did not need permission to beat his wife, the Qur’an restricted domestic violence by prescribing certain procedures for the resolution of a marital dispute in which a husband feared his wife’s lewd conduct. First, it is important to note that the application of verse 4:34 is restricted to a very specific situation in which the wife is thought to be guilty of *nushūz*, or lewd conduct. Second, the Qur’an established certain procedures by which a husband must adhere if confronted with such a situation. First, he is to counsel her. If a woman refuses to heed verbal counsel or admonition, then her husband could respond to the gravity of the situation by not sleeping with her, giving her the chance to realize the risks involved if she did not resume her commitment to the marriage.

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<sup>13</sup> For the complete analysis and discussion, see: Abu Sulayman, Abdulhamid A. *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Adultery is a serious offense in the Islamic context. A claim of adultery is grounds for a legal proceeding.

<sup>15</sup> Recite Qur’an 24: 11-20.

Third and finally, the term *daraba* (often mis-translated as “to beat”) suggests that the husband could symbolically tap her by using something very light, like a tissue, which is the most traditional interpretation. Nevertheless, even when the most traditional interpretation of the word *daraba* is applied, in no way does this interpretation allow abusive behavior, as it clearly specifies that the word *daraba* is to operate symbolically in this context. Traditional scholars placed so many conditions upon this light “hitting” or “tapping” that they rendered it merely symbolic. Among these conditions is that a husband could only use a *siwak* (wooden toothbrush) or a folded handkerchief and that he must not hit the face or leave any marks. In this regard, this verse functions as a restriction on using violence and not as a license. As Jamal Badawi<sup>16</sup> points out, this verse puts a limit on the severity of intervention, thereby preventing people from excessive abuse which may occur if the steps were not specified and limited.

Regardless of the interpretation one applies, this verse in no way sanctions domestic violence. Therefore, some contemporary jurists such as Dr. Taha Jabir Al-Alwani<sup>17</sup> suggest that in today’s societies, the third step in the process (i.e. “hitting” the wife) might not be applicable. Dr. Al-Alwani bases his opinion on the legislative rulings of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and other jurists in this matter, as well as other areas of Islamic law in which rulings take into consideration the specific circumstances and elements of any given issue.<sup>18</sup> Al-Alwani explains that jurists consider the purposes of marriage when deriving rulings from verses. The general purposes of

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<sup>16</sup> Badawi, J. *Gender Equity in Islam: Basic Principles*. Plainfield, IN: American Trust Publications, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Personal Communication, Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, President of the Graduate School of Islamic Social Sciences, Leesburg, Virginia. Put date of correspondence. December, 2003

<sup>18</sup> Personal Communication, Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, President of the Graduate School of Islamic Social Sciences, Leesburg, Virginia.

marriage include fulfilling the conditions needed for living in tranquility and harmony, building family relationships and networks, and procreation. The application of teachings from the Qur'an cannot contradict or undermine these goals. Sometimes jurists apply the literal meaning of a verse when that meaning will achieve these goals; at other times, they apply the spirit of a verse if the literal meaning hinders the achievement of these goals.

In the case of verse 4:34, emphasis is placed on the spirit of the verse, which is the protection of the family unit from a real threat to its survival. In today's world, beating one's wife would surely lead to the very destruction of the family unit that this verse seeks to preserve. According to Al-Alwani's methodology, the last step of the three-step process in verse 4:34 might no longer be applicable considering the changes in context and circumstances.

### **The Modern Context**

Cruelty comes into view again in today's world in different forms. However, the cruelest violence is that within the family. Violence occurs within the family every six to 20 seconds in the US, UK, and many other countries in the world including Muslim societies. Domestic violence is recognized as one of today's complex global societal dilemmas. It is defined as a "pattern of abusive behaviors used by someone to establish power and control over another person in a relationship. After a period of abuse, batterers are often apologetic, but as the cycle repeats the abuse usually gets worse over time."<sup>19</sup> The experts agree that the causes of these behaviors vary. Yet it is always the result of a complex interplay of psychological and social factors which have created an imbalance of power between the sexes, races, status and other differences. Where there is an imbalance

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<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.peacefulfamilies.org/aboutdv.html>.



of power, it may be abused; and it is this, coupled with society's tolerance, which has allowed domestic violence to flourish.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Islamic Paradigm**

The Qur'an represents a comprehensive model to protect the human family from any type of oppression. The essence of the Islamic paradigm is grounded in the concept of *tawhīd*, which refers to the Oneness and Uniqueness of God. Muslims believe that God created human beings—men and women—to worship and serve Him as *khalifahs*, representatives or vicegerents, of God: “*Behold. Thy Lord said to the angels. ‘I will create a vicegerent (trustee) on earth.’”* (Qur'an 2:30). The only aspect by which one person is deemed better than another in the sight of God is that of piety: “*O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you...*” (Qur'an 49:13).

Qur'anic teachings clearly outline the gender roles and relations through major concepts such as: (1) **Zawjiya** (Pairing), which establishes equality and cooperation: “*O mankind! Reverence your guardian-Lord, who created you from a single soul. Created, of like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women—fear God, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you), for God ever watches over you”* (Qur'an 4:1). (2) **Wilayah** (Protectors of each other) The Qur'an outlines the relationship between men and women as partners (*awliya* ' of one another in establishing a healthy family and just society. The concept of *wilayah* was explained in Surat *Al-Tawbah* and applied by Prophet Muhammad. The concept of *wilayah* establishes that men have no level of superiority over women, as God orders both genders to guide one another and keep each other in check. The Qur'an says in chapter 9, verse 71, “*Men and women are protectors of one*

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<sup>20</sup> Sandra Horley. “Domestic violence: the issue explained.”  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2001/mar/12/6>. Sandra is chief executive of Refuge.

*another: They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil, they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity and obey Allah and his messenger on them will Allah pour his mercy for Allah is exalted in power, wise.”*

The third concept is *Qiwama*, in which the Qur’an assigns men to be financially responsible for the family<sup>21</sup>; women are then free to take care of the family by being nurturers, without having the added stress of earning an income. While men are obligated to work in order to support the family, women may or may not choose to work outside the home depending on the individual circumstances of the family. Accordingly, each gender has special qualities that better enable it to perform a certain societal role; when that role is fulfilled, then society as a whole functions more effectively.<sup>22</sup>

Islam teaches that all people are created equal in worth and value regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or class: *“O mankind! Reverence your guardian-Lord, who created you from a single soul. Created, of like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women—fear God, through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you<sup>23</sup>), for God ever watches over you”* (Qur’an 4:1). It is important to make a distinction here between being identical and being equal. Islam recognizes that men and women have different abilities and strengths that complement each other. They differ physically and emotionally, but their differences do not lead one gender to be superior to the other. While men and women are considered equal in God’s sight, they have different roles to play in their life as they each seek to live according to God’s will. However, there is no higher value placed on one role versus the

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<sup>21</sup> *“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more than the other and because of the sustenance they provide from their own means...”* (4:34).

<sup>22</sup> See Salma Abugideiri & Zainab Alwani, *What Islam Says about Domestic Violence: A Guide for Helping Muslim Families*; (FAITH 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Refers to women.

other, since both men and women must work as partners in order to have healthy families and societies.<sup>24</sup>

In order to put this into action, the Qur'an addresses the following issues in great detail: family structure, gender roles, inheritance, the rules of *mahram*, marriage and divorce laws, reconciliation and financial matters. The Qur'an and Sunnah emphasize the connection between justice and piety, accountability to God, and the significance of taking preventive measures to avoid injustice and oppression.

The Qur'an recognizes that historically, in many societies, men had power over women. In pre-Islamic Arab society, for example, many women had very little or no property, status, and/or rights. Therefore, men (husbands, fathers, brothers, or guardians) were warned not to hurt or take advantage of women in any way in both the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. In times of conflict or discord, the reminder of being God-conscious in making choices and decisions was repeated over and over.<sup>25</sup> These reminders emphasize the hierarchal relationship between each individual and God, which helps guide every other human relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, many societies that are predominantly Muslim have cultural values that conflict with this understanding of equality. In some cultures, women have an inferior position as evidenced by limited legal rights or limited involvement in society. On the other hand, Westerners may view the position of women in other countries as inferior simply because it is different from the position of women in Western societies.

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<sup>24</sup> See Salma Abugideiri & Zainab Alwani, *What Islam Says about Domestic Violence: A Guide for Helping Muslim Families*; (FAITH 2003)

<sup>25</sup> See 65:1-12 for details concerning separation, divorce, reconciliation, punishment for transgressors and reward for those who obey God's laws.

<sup>26</sup> Abugideiri, S., and Z. Alwani.2003. *What Islam says about Domestic Violence*. Herndon: FAITH.

For example, Muslim women may choose not to work outside the home in certain Muslim societies. This is often because she does not need to work and because it is the husband's moral and social obligation to support her. By not working, she may be taking advantage of her right to be supported and dedicate herself more fully to taking care of her children or by making some other contribution to society through social activities. In this case, it may actually be a position of honor and respect not to work outside the home, acknowledging that being a mother and homemaker are real jobs in and of themselves.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Islamic Perspective on Marriage**

Marriage in Islam is noble and universally necessary because it brings tranquility, progeny, and continuation of life with purity and responsibility. Marriage is an act of worship; it provides a legitimate relationship between a man and a woman, and most importantly, it provides a vehicle for the fulfillment of humankind's divine purpose as God's vicegerents through procreation and human relations.<sup>28</sup> The foundation of an Islamic marriage and its purpose are described in the following verse from the Holy Qur'an: "*And among His signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts). Verily in that are signs for those who reflect*" (Qur'an 30:21). This verse can be taken as a reminder that spouses are inherently equal, and that the union between them is a peaceful and compassionate one.

As the author Alwani writes in her chapter "The Qur'anic Model for Harmony in Family Relations", God said: "*They are your libas (garments) and you are their*

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25 Abugideiri, S., and Z. Alwani.2003. *What Islam says about Domestic Violence*. Herndon: FAITH.

<sup>28</sup> Al Faruqi, I. (1992). *Al-Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought. Pp. 130-133.

*garments*” (Qur’an:2:187). A garment protects one from the dirt and grime of the outside world. Garments are the closest to our bodies, wrapping us in comfort. Being naturally conscious of appearance, people take time to choose the style, color, and they take time to clean, iron, and generally maintain it. When the various meanings of *libas* are translated into the context of a relationship, the parallels are obvious. Men and women are mutual garments for each other. They cover each other’s weaknesses, serve as protection and comfort from the harsh elements of reality, and safeguard the precious intimacy and secrets shared between them.<sup>29</sup>

When two individuals decide to unite in marriage, they are bound by a “solemn covenant.”<sup>30</sup> Each person entering a marriage makes a covenant with God to adhere to the teachings of the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet in fulfilling the obligations of the marital relationship. God is a witness over this marriage contract. Any behavior or interaction done with the intent of upholding divine instruction will be rewarded by God in the hereafter and, at the same time, will contribute to a healthy family unit. Likewise, all behaviors that violate divine instruction, including the foundation of mercy and love, are punishable by God.

It is important to remember that the structure of the Muslim family is part of a larger context within the overall paradigm of Islam. The Qur’an holds men responsible for maintaining the family financially.<sup>31</sup> Men are responsible for providing a broad range

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<sup>29</sup> Alwani, Zainab. “The Qur’anic Model for Harmony in family relations”: chapter of the book: *Change from within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities*. Edited by Maha B. Alkhateeb & Salma Elkadi Abugideiri. PP51.

<sup>30</sup> Yusuf Ali, 4:21

<sup>31</sup> “*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other and because of the sustenance they provide from their own means...*” (Qur’an 4:34).

of needs, including spiritual, emotional, and educational needs. Without this Divine Law, some men may not fulfill their financial responsibility towards their family. Women are then freed to take care of the family by providing nurture and care, without having the added stress of earning an income.

Men and women are partners in the endeavor of maintaining a healthy family unit in which children are raised to be God-conscious members of society. The Qur'an sets up the framework for different roles that are equal in value and are complementary. Each gender has special qualities that, in general, allow each gender to be better qualified for a particular role. The Qur'an says, *"And do not covet that by which Allah has made some of you excel others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask Allah of His grace; surely Allah knows all things"* (Qur'an, 4:32).

The fact that husband and wife have different roles to play in the family does not in any way suggest that men are better than women, or have God-given power over them. Furthermore, the roles of men and women are not mutually exclusive. Both parents must be involved in raising the children. Although each may participate in different aspects of the child's upbringing, both are equally responsible for the overall welfare of the child. *Shura* (mutual consultation) is an important practical principle and tool rooted in the Islamic teaching. The implantation of *shura*, as essentially a decision-making process among equals, is based on equality among those consulting in order to reach a collective decision.<sup>32</sup>

The fact that women are the primary managers of household affairs does not mean that husbands should not help, or that women are restricted exclusively to this role.

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<sup>32</sup> Qur'an 2:233, 42:38.

Prophet Muhammad, the model husband, used to help with domestic chores such as sweeping and mending his clothes,<sup>33</sup> and his wife Aisha became noted as a leader and a teacher who many men consulted after the Prophet's death.

### **Distortions of Religious Teachings**

Islam frequently and decisively prohibits any form of oppression, which could be defined as “an unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power.”<sup>34</sup> The philosophy or the objective of Islamic Divine rulings is to resolve the problems that take place in human society, and to present an alternative model.

These statements may be contradictory to the misconceptions that are often perpetuated by people who do not have an adequate understanding of the Islamic paradigm. Sometimes Muslims themselves may take verses from the Qur'an or sayings of the Prophet out of context to justify their behavior. This manipulation of religious teachings should be viewed as the same type of behavior that abusers of other faiths engage in to justify their actions. One example of the abuse of religious injunctions by men is the practice of polygamy. As Karen Armstrong writes in her book *Muhammad*,

“The Qur'anic institution of polygamy was a piece of social legislation. It was designed not to gratify the male sexual appetite, but to correct the injustice done to widow, orphans, and other female dependants, who were especially vulnerable. They were often sexually abused by their male guardians or converted into a financial asset by being sold into slavery. Polygamy was designed to ensure that unprotected women would be decently married, and to abolish the old loose, irresponsible liaisons; men could have only four wives and must treat them equitably, it was an unjustifiably wicked act to devour their property. The Qur'an was attempting to give women a legal status that most Western women would not enjoy until the nineteenth century.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Abu Shaqqah, *Tahrir al-Mar'ah*, V. 1, pp. 128-129.

<sup>34</sup> *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1983.

<sup>35</sup> Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad: A prophet for our time*. Atlas Books & Harper Collins Publishers, 2006. PP 147

Another example of the abuse of religious law is in the case of marital discord or a serious dispute within the family; the Qur'an provides a method for resolving such disputes. This method includes different steps to reach the ultimate solution in resolving the conflict peacefully. The abovementioned verse, 4:34,<sup>36</sup> for example, outlines different steps to prevent problems from escalating, and it is forbidden to skip one step and go to the next without exhausting every possible aspect of the previous step. The Qur'an emphasizes good communication. Muslim men who abuse their wives completely neglect and misunderstand this verse. First, let us be clear that religion is never a cause of domestic violence. While Muslim men may try to justify their abuse according to this verse, the truth is that the motive for their abuse is not and can never be religion. How can one's relationship with God, which is the essence of religion, be a motive for someone to inflict harm or violence against another human being? The causes of domestic violence are many, which experts in this field have elucidated. Regardless of the reasons, however, we can agree that God's teachings are not one of them.

While Muslim men who are guilty of domestic violence might in retrospect cite verse 4:34 to justify their behavior, the truth is that they are attempting to skip the first two important steps and jump to the third step (which nevertheless, is symbolic and not literal in the most conservative interpretation of this verse<sup>37</sup>). The abusers in this regard ignore the general purposes of marriage in Islam, which include fulfilling the conditions

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<sup>36</sup> *“And as for those women whose ill-will (nushuz) you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then hit them (lightly) [daraba]; and if thereupon they pay you heed,<sup>36</sup> do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great! And if you have reason to fear that a breach might occur between a [married] couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people; if they both want to set things aright, God may bring about their reconciliation. Behold, God is indeed all-knowing, aware.”*<sup>36</sup>(4:34-35).

<sup>37</sup> See the discussion of this verse at the beginning of this paper.



needed for living in tranquility and harmony, building family relationships and networks,  
and procreation.