

Surah 4. An-Nisaa

Asad: MEN SHALL take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter,⁴² and with what they may spend out of their possessions. And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has [ordained to be] guarded.⁴³ And as for those women whose ill-will⁴⁴ you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them;⁴⁵ and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great!

Malik: Men are overseers over women because Allah has given the one more strength than other, and because men are required to spend their wealth for the maintenance of women. Honorable women are, therefore, devoutly obedient and guard in the husband's absence what Allah require them to guard their husband's property and their own honor. As to those women from whom you fear disobedience, first admonish them, then refuse to share your bed with them, and then, if necessary, beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further actions against them and do not make excuses to punish them. Allah is Supremely Great and is aware of your actions.

Pickthall: Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath men 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 hath guarded. As for those from whom ye 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.

Yusuf Ali: 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 ye 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).^{545 546 547 548}

Transliteration: Alrrijalu qawwamoona AAala alnnisai bima faddala Allahu baAAadahum AAala baAAadin wabima anfaqoo min amwalihim faalssalihatu qanitatun hafithatun lilghaybi bima hafitha Allahu waallatee takhafuona nushoozunna faAAai oohunna waohjuroohunna fee almadajiiAAi waidriboohunna fain a^{ta}AAanakum fala tabghoo AAalayhinna sabeelan inna Allaha kana AAaliyyan kabeeran |

Khatab:

Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with.¹

And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them ?first?,
?if they persist,? do not share their beds, ?but if they still persist,? then discipline them ?gently?.² But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great.

Author Comments

42 - Lit., "more on some of them than on the others". - The expression qawwam is an intensive form of

qa'im ("one who is responsible for" or "takes care of" a thing or a person). Thus, qama 'ala 'l-mar'ah signifies "he undertook the maintenance of the woman" or "he maintained her" (see Lane VIII, 2995). The grammatical form qawwam is more comprehensive than qa'im, and combines the concepts of physical maintenance and protection as well as of moral responsibility: and it is because of the last-named factor that I have rendered this phrase as "men shall take full care of women".

43 - Lit., "who guard that which cannot be perceived (al-ghayb) because God has [willed it to be] guarded".

44 - The term nushuz (lit., "rebellion" - here rendered as "ill-will") comprises every kind of deliberate bad behaviour of a wife towards her husband or of a husband towards his wife, including what is nowadays described as "mental cruelty"; with reference to the husband, it also denotes "ill-treatment", in the physical sense, of his wife (cf. verse {128} of this surah). In this context, a wife's "ill-will" implies a deliberate, persistent breach of her marital obligations.

45 - It is evident from many authentic Traditions that the Prophet himself intensely detested the idea of beating one's wife, and said on more than one occasion, "Could any of you beat his wife as he would beat a slave, and then lie with her in the evening?" (Bukhari and Muslim). According to another Tradition, he forbade the beating of any woman with the words, "Never beat God's handmaidens" (Abu Da'ud, Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Hibban and Hakim, on the authority of Iyas ibn 'Abd Allah; Ibn Hibban, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas; and Bayhaqi, on the authority of Umm Kulthum). When the above Qur'an-verse authorizing the beating of a refractory wife was revealed, the Prophet 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 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 Da'ad, Nasa'i 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-Shafi'i) 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.

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i.e., their husbands' honour and wealth.

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Disciplining one's wife gently is the final resort. The earliest commentators understood that this was to be light enough not to leave a mark, should be done with nothing bigger than a tooth stick, and should not be on the face. Prophet Muhammad (?) said to his companions "Do not beat the female servants of Allah." He said that honourable husbands do not beat their wives, and he himself never hit a woman or a servant. If a woman feels her husband is ill-behaved, then she can get help from her guardian or seek divorce.

545 - Qawwam: one who stands firm in another's business, protects his interests, and looks after his affairs- or it may be, standing firm in his own business, managing affairs, with a steady purpose. Cf. iv. 135.

546 - Or the sentence may be rendered: "and protect (the husband's interests) in his absence, as Allah has protected them." If we take the rendering as in the text, the meaning is: the good wife is obedient and harmonious in her husband's presence, and in his absence guards his reputation and property and her own virtue, as ordained by Allah. If we take the rendering as in the note, we reach the same result in a different way: the good wife, in her husband's absence, remembering how Allah has given her a sheltered position, does everything to justify that position by guarding her own virtue and his reputation and property.

547 - In case of family jars four steps are mentioned, to be taken in that order: (1) perhaps verbal advice or admonition may be sufficient; (2) if not, sex relations may be suspended; (3) if this is not sufficient, some slight physical correction may be administered: but Imam Shafii considers this inadvisable, though permissible, and all authorities are unanimous in deprecating any sort of cruelty, even of the nagging kind, as mentioned in the next clause; (4) if all this fails, a family council is recommended in iv. 35 below.

548 - Temper, nagging, sarcasm, speaking at each other in other people's presence, reverting to past faults which should be forgiven and forgotten,-all this is forbidden. And the reason given is characteristic of Islam. You must live all your life as in the presence of Allah, Who is high above us, but Who watches over us. How petty and contemptible will our little squabbles appear in His presence!

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