

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE WORD 'DARABA' (TO BEAT) IN CONTEXT OF WIVES

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Please note the main article: [Does the Quran Really Sanction Beating of Wives?](#)

The imperative verb '**idrib**' is formed from the root **D-R-B** and the ground form (Form 1 or stem) verb 'daraba'.

The Arabic word used in verse 4:34 is 'idribo' **(1)** 'hunna' **(2)**. (In Quranic recitation - 'idribohun').

The two words are connected with a subject pronoun 'wow' which is not the focus here, nor is the conjunction prefix 'wa' which simply means 'and'.

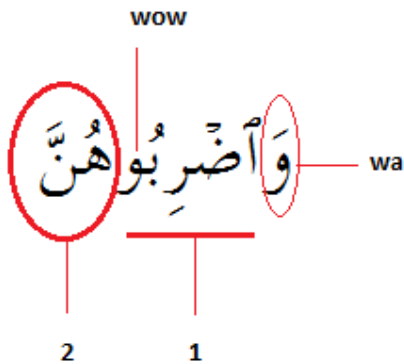


Illustration - Joseph Islam

Let us examine the two main parts of the word again, 'Idrib' **(1)** being an imperative verb and 'Hunna' **(2)**, a feminine plural pronoun (referring to the wives)

A common understanding of Arabic is that [**Idrib**] + **Noun/Pronoun** would mean to beat someone which is certainly the form 'idribohunna' is encountered in the Quranic text of verse 4:34.

WITH A PREPOSITION (AN) 'IDRIB' CAN MEAN TO SEPARATE

Another well accepted understanding of Arabic is that [**idhrib**] + **AN + Noun / Pronoun** can mean 'to turn away, shun, separate and avoid' someone.

اضربوا عنهن
an

Illustration - Joseph Islam

DARABA vb. (I) ~ to strike, smite, stamp, beat; to liken or strike (a parable or similitude), to cite (an example or a dispute); (*daraba fi al-ard*) to journey; to draw or cast (a veil); (with prep. 'ala') to pitch on, to stamp; (with prep. 'an) to turn something away; (with prep. bayn) to set up between, to separate, (n.vb) striking, smiting, etc.; (with prep. fi) journeying. [1]

This is also confirmed by the lexicon excerpt below, where we note that 'daraba an' has been rendered as to 'turn away from, leave, forsake, abandon, avoid or shun.'

ضرب *ḍaraba* : (*ḍarb*) to beat, strike, hit (s.o., s.th., ب with; ب على with s.th. on; على s.o. on); to shoot, fire (s, s at s.o., at s.th.), shell, bombard (s, s s.o., s.th.); to play (s, على a musical instrument); to make music; to type (on a typewriter); to sting (scorpion); to separate, part (بين people); to impose (s على on s.o. s.th.); ضرب عن to turn away from, leave, forsake, abandon, avoid, or shun s.o. or s.th.; — (*ḍarb*, ضربان *ḍarabān*) to pulsate, palpitate, throb, beat (vein,

Source: Hans Wehr's Modern Written Arabic [2]

The argument is usually advanced that as the preposition 'an' is absent from the particular text in the Quran, the word 'idribohunna' cannot be rendered as 'shun/turn away' and therefore must retain the meaning 'to beat them'. There is no similar comparison of the Quranic term 'idribohunna' in the form: **idrib + Noun / Pronoun** (as in verse 4:34) in other parts of the Quran.

(Please see section '**ANOMALY**' below)

'IDRIBOHUNNA' TO MEAN SHUN OR TO TURN AWAY

Students of classical Arabic and researchers of older Arabic lexicons will note however, that the preposition 'an' is **not necessarily** required to render the term 'idribo'hunna' to turn away, shun, avoid or separate. This fact can be attested from the following lexicon excerpt of Edward Lanes who quotes TA (Taj-ul Urus), S (The Sihah), Msb (The misbah of El Feiyumi) and the K (The Kamoos) to discuss the relevant terms.

In this way, the Quranic term 'idribo hunna' can mean to 'turn away or separate' **without** the preposition 'an'. This certainly seems to be the understanding of earlier classical Arabic lexicon authorities that were scrutinised and cited by Edward Lanes.

(A, Mṣb, TA.) — ضَرَبَ عَنْهُ + *He turned away a person or thing from him [or it]; as also*
ضَرَبَ : (TA:) ضَرَبَ عَنْهُ signifies, (S, Mṣb,) or signifies also, (TA,) and (Mṣb, TA) so does ضَرَبَ عَنْهُ, (Mṣb, K, TA,) [the latter app. for ضَرَبَ نَفْسَهُ عَنْهُ,] + *He turned away from, avoided, shunned, or left, him, or it; (S, * Mṣb, K, * TA; *)* namely, a person, (TA,) or a thing.

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

ANOMALY

Whenever the imperative verb 'idrib' is used in the Quran to denote 'strike', whether idiomatically or otherwise, the Quran always qualifies it by making it clear by either one or both of the following:

- (1) What object to use to strike with, and / or
- (2) What part of the body or 'object' to strike.

- 002:060 Strike the rock **(2)** with your staff **(1)**
 002:073 Strike him **(2)** with a part of it (heifer) **(1)**
 007:160 Strike the rock **(2)** with your staff **(1)**

008:012 Strike off their heads **(2)** and strike off every fingertip **(2)** of them
008:012 Strike off every fingertip **(2)** of them.
020:077 Strike for them a dry path in the sea (See 26:63 - elaborated - Strike the sea **(2)**
with your staff **(1)**)
038:044 Take in your hand a bundle of rushes **(1)**, and strike with it

However, **only** in verse 4:34 do we notice that the imperative verb 'idrib' neither tells us **(1)** what object to use to strike with nor **(2)** what part of the body to strike.

Without qualification, it would be difficult to conclude that the intention of the verb was ever to 'strike'. If 'idribohunna' was translated in the traditional manner to 'strike / beat them', then such an isolated, unqualified rendition would leave it wide open for any aggressed husband to beat / strike his wife in any manner, wherever he wanted, with any amount of given force.

Therefore, verse 4:34 does not fit the Quran's usual qualification of 'idrib' when rendered to 'strike/beat'.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As has been shown above , the term 'Idribo hunna' in Surah Nisa (4.34) can mean to **'shun - turn away from'** (not necessarily to beat) and does not necessarily require a preposition **'an'** for this meaning to be operative. It was also noted that the imperative verb 'idrib' has never been used in the Quran in an unqualified manner without explaining (1) What object to use to strike with or (2) What part of the body or object to strike.

039:018

"Those who listen to the Word (the Quran) and follow the **best meaning in it / best of it (Arabic: fayattabi'una ahsanahu)** those are the ones whom God has guided and those are the one's endowed with understanding **(Arabic: Albabi)**

039.055

"And follow **the best of what is revealed to you from your Lord, before the penalty comes to you suddenly while you do not perceive!**"

Related Article:

(1) [Does the Quran Really Sanction Beating of Wives?](#)

REFERENCES

[1] KASSIS. H E, A Concordance of the Qur'an, University of California Press: Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, Page 410

[2] WEHR. H, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Edited by J.Milton Cowan, 3rd Edition, Spoken Languages Services Inc. 1976, Page 538

[3] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 5, Page 1779

Highlights marked in red and the blue shaded area on the lexicon excerpts [1] & [2] are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original texts other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

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