

Surah 2. Al-Baqara

Asad: We said: "Apply this [principle] to some of those [cases of unresolved murder]:⁵⁷ in this way God saves lives from death and shows you His will, so that you might [learn to] use your reason."⁵⁸

Malik: So We said: "Strike the dead body with a piece of the slaughtered cow." That's how Allah brought the dead to life to show you His Signs so that you may understand His power to restore life.

Mustafa Khattab:

So We instructed, "Strike the dead body with a piece of the cow." This is how ?easily? Allah brings the dead to life, showing you His signs so that you may understand.

Pickthall: And We said: Smite him with some of it. Thus Allah bringeth the dead to life and showeth you His portents so that ye may understand.

Yusuf Ali: So We said: "Strike the (body) with a piece of the (heifer)." Thus Allah bringeth the dead to life and showeth you His Signs perchance ye may understand.

Transliteration: Faqulna idriboohu bibaAAadiha kathalika yuhyee Allahu almawta wayureekum ayatihi laAAallakum taAAqiloona

Author Comments

57 - The phrase idribuhu bi-ba'diha can be literally translated as "strike him [or "it"] with something of her [or "it"]" - and this possibility has given rise to the fanciful assertion by many commentators that the children of Israel were commanded to strike the corpse of the murdered man with some of the flesh of the sacrificed cow, whereupon he was miraculously restored to life and pointed out his murderer! Neither the Qur'an, nor any saying of the Prophet, nor even the Bible offers the slightest warrant for this highly imaginative explanation, which must, therefore, be rejected - quite apart from the fact that the pronoun hu in idribuhu has a masculine gender, while the noun nafs (here translated as "human being") is feminine in gender: from which it follows that the imperative idribuhu cannot possibly refer to nafs. On the other hand, the verb daraba (lit., "he struck") is very often used in a figurative or metonymic sense, as, for instance, in the expression daraba fi 'l-ard ("he journeyed on earth"), or daraba 'sh-shay' bi'sh-shay' ("he mixed one thing with another thing"), or daraba mathal ("he coined a similitude" or "propounded a parable" or "gave an illustration"), or 'ala darb wahid ("similarly applied" or "in the same manner"), or duribat 'alayhim adh-dhillah ("humiliation was imposed on them" or "applied to them"), and so forth. Taking all this into account, I am of the opinion that the imperative idribuhu occurring in the above Qur'anic passage must be translated as "apply it" or "this" (referring, in this context, to the principle of communal responsibility). As for the feminine pronoun ha in ba'diha ("some of it"), it must necessarily relate to the nearest preceding feminine noun - that is, to the nafs that has been murdered, or the act of murder itself about which (fiha) the community disagreed. Thus, the phrase idribuhu bi-ba'diha may be suitably rendered as "apply this [principle] to some of those [cases of unresolved murder]": for it is obvious that the principle of communal responsibility for murder by a person or persons unknown can be applied only to some and not to all such cases.

58 - Lit., "God gives life to the dead and shows you His messages" (i.e., He shows His will by means of such messages or ordinances). The figurative expression "He gives life to the dead" denotes the saving of lives, and is analogous to that in [5:32](#). In this context it refers to the prevention of bloodshed and the killing of innocent persons (Manar I, 351), be it through individual acts of revenge, or in result of an erroneous judicial process based on no more than vague suspicion and possibly misleading circumstantial evidence.

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