

Nikah (Wedlock) in Islam
Meaning and Procedure
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In order to understand the procedure of Nikah in Islam, it is essential to know the meaning of the word Nikah first.

Nikah derives from the word “Nakha”, meaning truce, agreement, and/or contract. According to the civil law of marriage, this contract is a distinguished contract as the principles and procedures of Nikah are obtained from the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him). However, this is not a sacred matrimony. According to Shariah, Nikah is not mandatory, it is regarded as a sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh), or sunnah mu’akkadah. If either a man or a woman decides to pursue marriage, they will gain reward from Allah (SWT) because it is strongly emphasized by the Prophet (pbuh). In this agreement, both the husband and wife also have the right to nullify this contract. If a woman asks for divorce, that is called Khula.

Procedure:

In Islam, both men and women have the right to propose for marriage, not only men. The first step for Nikah is for either party to propose, which is called proposal and acceptance. Once they have agreed to accept each other, the next step is to set up a mahr (dowry) by the woman. Dowry could range from as little as a fruit date to as big as property, to a specific amount of money, or even the Qur’an. The Prophet (pbuh) said that the less the dowry, the better. It is the right of a woman to ask for a dowry. Since Islam is a deen of justice, the bride should be just and not ask for something that is unreasonable in regards to the economic capacity of the man in which she chooses to marry. The purpose of the dowry can be seen as a gift to the bride and/or to ensure a sense of financial security. Besides the dowry, in a true Islamic Nikah, there are conditions and provisions for the Nikah. For example, a woman agrees to marry in the case her husband provides so and so or accepts this or that. Or the woman says if she suffers from the first child delivery, she will not have the second child. That is her provision.

The next step is to choose either two male witnesses or two women and one man as witnesses. No Nikah can be performed without witnesses. In the past, in some Muslim countries, there used to be four male witnesses. Two to witness the Nikah and two for ma’refah (recognition) in which they both knew the groom and the bride. This was because women were not allowed to be present in their own Nikah so a representative (wakil) would speak on her behalf. That was wrong to not allow women to not be present in their Nikah. It is against the sunnah if the bride is not present in her own Nikah ceremony because Bibi Fatima Al Zahra (R), the daughter of the Prophet (pbuh), was present in her Nikah. Witnesses should also be adults and be mentally sound.

Sermon during a Nikah ceremony is optional to be read or not to be read, it is not mandatory. Some do read a short sermon, which is the first verse of the Sura AL Nissah, and is mostly at the end of the Nikah ceremony that serves as a closure and prayer. Some read it in the beginning. Reading the sermon in the beginning will confuse the audience because they question how come one reads a sermon without the three most important aspects of the Nikah not indicated, which are proposal and acceptance, set up the dowry, and witnessing by witnesses.

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