

# The Nuts & Bolts of an Islamic Marriage

**Description:** The article discusses important details of an Islamic marriage that every new Muslim should be aware of before getting married.

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## Objective:

- To learn the goals of marriage.
- To learn the meaning and role of a *walee*.
- To appreciate the criteria for selecting a spouse.
- To learn the rules of meeting a prospect before marriage and the marriage proposal.
- To understand the conditions of a valid Islamic marriage contract.
- To learn about dowry and the wedding feast.

## Arabic Terms:

- *Imaan* - faith, belief or conviction.
- *Halal* - permissible.
- *Imam* - someone who leads the prayer.
- *Walee* - Legal guardian.
- *Taqwa* - Awe or fear of Allah, piety, God-consciousness. It describes a state of awareness of Allah in everything one does.
- *Idda* - waiting period for a widow or divorcée.
- *Istikharah prayer* - the prayer for Guidance.
- *Mahr* - dowry, bridal gift, given from a man to his wife.
- *Waleemah* - wedding feast.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.

Marriage is a beautiful institution in Islam. It is a bond unifying a man and a woman for a lifetime for the purpose of loving one another, helping one another, and in reproducing and raising children to be good Muslims. Actually, through marriage a Muslim man and woman worship Allah. Allah's Prophet said, **"When a person gets married, he has protected half of his *Imaan* (faith), so let him be conscious of Allah with regard to the other half."** (*Tabarani*)

## Goals of Marriage

1. Seeking offspring and continuing the human species by producing children in a natural way.
2. Enjoying Allah's gifts, finding companionship, fulfilling one's sexual desires, and getting pleasure in a *halal* (permissible) way.
3. Lowering the gaze, exercising self-control, preserving modesty, and keeping oneself away from what is forbidden.

Allah's Prophet encouraged Muslims to marry. He said, **"Young men, whoever among you is able to marry, let him get married, for this is better for lowering the gaze and guarding the chastity. Whoever cannot afford to get married, let him fast, as fasting would act as a restraint for him."** (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

If a person cannot exercise self-control and is worried about doing something forbidden, then getting married becomes obligatory.

## The Marriage Guardian (*Walee*)

A Muslim woman needs a marriage guardian, known as a *walee*, to help her with the process. A woman's Muslim father or brother act as her *walee*. For a new Muslim with no male Muslim relatives, the *Imam* of the mosque should act as a *walee* or he may appoint someone to be her *walee* and help her in the process.

The job of a *walee* is to help a woman get married, talk to prospective suitors, question them about their intentions, make necessary investigations, and advise her on their suitability. The *walee* is there to help and facilitate the woman in getting married to a suitable man.

## Choosing a Spouse

The Prophet explained,

"A woman is married for four reasons: on account of her wealth, her noble descent, her beauty, and her religion. So, marry the one who is religious and you will prosper." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

In another beautiful hadith, he said, **"The world is a passing delight, and the best enjoyment of this world is a righteous wife."** (*Saheeh Muslim*)

The Prophet has advised to marry a woman with a religious disposition because she will assist a man living a daily life pleasing to Allah and keep him safe from falling into sinful activities.

### **What to look for in a prospective wife:**

- *Taqwa* (piety)
- Affectionate nature
- Obedience
- Patience
- Contentment

### **What to look for in a prospective husband:**

- *Taqwa* (piety)
- *Halal* income to support his family
- Basic Islamic knowledge
- Ability to think soundly
- Tolerance, control over anger
- Responsibility

## **Meeting before Marriage**

It is permissible for a Muslim man and a Muslim woman to meet one another, see one another, and talk to one another with the intention to get married. Some restrictions should be followed though. They should not meet alone. They should not date. Their conversation should not slip into sex talk. Their intention should be announced and their meeting must be chaperoned. This is so they can make the right decision without compromising the limits of modesty. The *walee* will play a major role in arranging these meetings.

The Prophet said,

“If one of you feels in his heart that he should offer a marriage proposal to a certain woman, let him take a look at her, for it is more likely to promote intimacy between them.” (*Musnad*)

## **Marriage Proposal**

The next step for a man who finds a suitable woman, is to propose. In Islam, the

marriage proposal is simply a **promise** to marry. Breaking that promise without a good reason would be dishonesty.

If the woman is a widow or was divorced, the man should wait for her *idda* (waiting period) to expire. *Idda* will be explained in more detail in a later lesson. It is also not allowed to propose to a woman whom another man has proposed and his proposal has been accepted.

## Prayer for Guidance (*Istikharah*) & Seeking Advice

Prophet Muhammad taught us to pray a special prayer known as *Istikharah* prayer or the prayer for Guidance. It is offered when seeking guidance from Allah when making an important decision or making a choice in a complex situation. The *Istikharah* prayer is two units of prayer with a special supplication made afterwards. In it, a person asks Allah for the best course of action to take<sup>[1]</sup>. In addition to this prayer, one should also seek the advice of those he trusts.

## Marriage Contract

In Islam, the marriage is a contract between the two parties. The four basic conditions for the marriage contract to be valid are:

1. Consent of the woman's *walee* (marriage guardian)
2. Agreement of the woman
3. Two male, Muslim witnesses
4. The offer to marry and its acceptance

## The Bride's Right to Dowry (*Mahr*)

In Islam, the wife has a right over the husband that he gives her a dowry, known as "*mahr*" in Arabic. What is *mahr*? It is a gift a husband must give his wife at the time of marriage out of his free will without expecting anything in return. The *mahr* is the right of a woman over her husband that becomes her property. There is no minimum or maximum limit for *mahr*. It is better to keep it affordable to make marriage easy. The *mahr* can be anything that the two parties agree to. It can be a mere token or a house and car, or even more. The Prophet has declared that even an iron ring is enough if the bride will accept it or teaching her some chapters of the Quran.

## The Wedding Feast (*Waleemah*)

The new husband is highly encouraged to give a traditional wedding feast called "*Waleemah*" in Arabic. The feast is an established *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. When

one of his companions, Abdur-Rahman bin Auf got married, the Prophet instructed him, **“Offer a feast to celebrate the wedding, even if it consists of no more than a sheep.”**<sup>[2]</sup> When the Prophet married Safiyya, he gave the wedding feast after three days.<sup>[3]</sup>

Who gets invited to the *waleemah* party? The husband should not distinguish between the rich and the poor. The Prophet of Allah said, **“The worst food of the wedding feast is that in which only the rich are invited and the poor are avoided. And whoever does not respond to the invitation has disobeyed Allah and His Messenger.”** ( *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

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Endnotes:

<sup>[1]</sup> For more information on *Istikharah*, please see: <http://www.newmuslims.com/lessons/163/>

<sup>[2]</sup> *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

<sup>[3]</sup> *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

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