

Marriage — the steps in order

A nikah is a contract with named parts: consent, a guardian, a dower, witnesses, and a meal that makes it public. Each part has its own text.



1 • What it is for

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا
وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً

“He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may find rest in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy.”

Qur'an 30:21

2 • Marry them off

وَأَنْكِحُوا الْأَيْمَىٰ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ

“And marry off the unmarried among you.” If they are poor, the verse adds, Allah will enrich them from His bounty.

Qur'an 24:32

3 • Choose on religion

تُكَحُّ الْمَرْأَةُ لَأَرْبَعٍ لِمَالِهَا وَلِحَسَبِهَا وَجَمَالِهَا وَلِدِينِهَا، فَاظْفَرْ بِذَاتِ
الدِّينِ تَرِبَتْ يَدَاكَ

“A woman is married for four: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty and her religion. Take hold of the one with religion.”

Sahih al-Bukhari 5090

4 • Her word decides

سَكَتَهَا إِذْنُهَا

‘A’ishah asked whether women are consulted about marriage. “Yes.” And a shy virgin's silence? “Her silence is her consent.”

Sahih al-Bukhari 6946 • 6971

5 • The guardian

لَا نِكَاحَ إِلَّا بِوَلِيِّ

“There is no marriage without a guardian.” The Hanafi school allows an adult woman to contract her own nikah; the other three require the wali.

Sunan Abi Dawud 2085 • sahih • the schools differ

6 • The mahr is hers

وَأَتُوا النِّسَاءَ صَدُقَتَيْنِ نَحْلَةً

“And give the women their dower as a free gift.” It is paid to her, not to her family, and it is hers to keep.

Qur'an 4:4

7 • It need not be large

تَزَوَّجَ وَلَوْ بِخَاتَمٍ مِنْ حَدِيدٍ

To a man who wanted to marry and had nothing: “Marry, even with a ring of iron.” The amount is not what makes the contract.

Sahih al-Bukhari 5150

8 • A solemn covenant

وَأَخَذَنْ مِنْكُمْ مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا

“...and they have taken from you a solemn covenant.” The schools require witnesses to the contract; they differ on the number and detail.

Qur'an 4:21 • fiqh: the schools differ

9 • The walimah

بَارَكَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَبَارَكَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجَمَعَ بَيْنُكُمَا فِي خَيْرٍ

“When one of you is invited to a wedding feast, let him come.” His congratulation was: Allah bless you both, and join you in good.

Sahih al-Bukhari 5173 • Sunan Ibn Majah 1905 • sahih