

Salim weds **Kathleen**

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An Islamic wedding is short and simple. Unlike the orthodox image of Islam, most of its tenets are modern including those governing wedding. A Muslim wedding besides its traditional ceremony also consist a legal document registering the marriage contract that is signed between the bride and the bridegroom, with terms and condition laid out explicitly and with the option given to the bride to divorce her husband.

The wedding ceremony on the whole revolves around the basic promise that the marriage should be with the consent of both the bride and the bridegroom. A lot of importance is given to the consent of the bride.

Some customs associated with the Islamic wedding ceremony differs from country to country. A marriage in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon would definitely have some local customs incorporated in the general Islamic wedding rituals. Similarly Indian Muslim wedding will have some customs strikingly similar to wedding ceremonies of other communities in India.

Let us understand the general ceremony step by step.

Barat Welcome

The groom arrives at the wedding venue with his barat. A music band strike up some traditional notes to announce their arrival. The groom shares a drink of "sharbat" with bride's brother. The bride's sisters play pranks and welcome the guests with flowers and sometimes sprinkle rose water.

Nikah

The Nikah or wedding ceremony can be conducted at the home of the bride or the groom, or at any other convenient venue. A Kazi (priest) in the presence of close family members and relatives conducts the

ceremony. In orthodox Muslim communities, the men and women are seated separately. The 'Walis' (the father of the bride and of the bridegroom) play an important role in the ceremony. The Kazi reads selected verses from the Quran and the Nikah is complete after the Ijab-e-Qubul (proposal and acceptance). The boy's side proposes and the girl's side conveys her assent. The mutual consent of the bride and groom is of great importance for the marriage to be legal. On the day of the Nikah that the elder members of the two families decide the amount of Mehar. The Mehar is a compulsory amount of money given by the groom's family to the bride.

Nikahnama

The Nikahnama is a document in which the marriage contract is registered. It contains a set of terms and condition as that must be respected by both the parties, also gives the bride the right to divorce her husband. For the contract to be legal, it must be signed by the bridegroom, the bride, the Walis, and the Kazi.

Blessing the Groom

The groom receives blessings from the older women and offers them his salaam. The guests pray for the newlyweds.

Dinner, Prayers and Aarsimashaf

Dinner is a lavish spread. Usually the women and the men dine separately, After dinner, the newly weds sits together for the first time. Their heads are covered by a dupatta while they read prayers under the direction of the maulvi (priest). The Quran is placed between the couple and they are allowed to see each other only through mirrors.

Post-wedding rituals

After the actual wedding day there are also a number of rituals which have to take place. Lets have a look and see what these actually are and what they signify.

Rukhsat

The bride's family bids her a tearful farewell before she departs for her husband's house. The bride's father gives her hands to her husband and tells him to take protect and take good care of her.

Welcoming the Bride

The grooms mother holds the Quran above the head of her new daughter-in-law as she enters her new home for the first time after the wedding.

Chauthi

The Chauthi is the fourth day after the wedding, when the bride visits the home of her parents. She receives a joyous welcome on this day.

Walima

The Walima is the lavish reception that the groom's family hosts after the Nikah. It is a joyous occasion that brings together the two families, their relatives and other well-wishers.