

Suggestions for Muslim marriages in a Da'wa context

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1. Notes for imams.

In the new multicultural Britain we find that imams and other celebrants are increasingly being asked to provide marriage ceremonies which can make a good impression on non-Muslim friends and relatives. Planning their marriages, young Muslims often feel that the modern Arab, Turkish or Indian *nikah* traditions may leave non-Muslims feeling that Islam leaves something to be desired. A da'wa opportunity is thus missed, as some guests may never again in their lives experience a Muslim event. So here is a form which I sometimes use and which helps non-Muslims (and some young Muslims) overcome their prejudices, by providing a Sharia-compliant but also beautiful form of *nikah*.

First, some general suggestions. Ask the families if music can be avoided during the reception - it is usually too loud, never helps the atmosphere and is often genuinely annoying. But during the ceremony, if you have good singers available, then it is a good idea to include one or two songs, perhaps between the readings. The *Ra'yyat al-hamd* included in the Hamdiyya is excellent, and has a simple tune that guests can join in. It is often sung at weddings in Morocco. Other songs in the Hamdiyya may also be suitable. At all costs, avoid cheesy 'nasheeds' with awkward and mawkish lyrics!

I have included some English-language poems which have been used in *nikah* celebrations, but these are only suggestions. Modern Muslim poetry by Abdul Hayy Moore, Paul Sutherland, Abdalhamid Evans, Joel Hayward, and other literary bridgebuilders, is likely to appeal to mixed audiences, although the choice is up to you. It is good to ask the bride and groom beforehand if they have any favourites, and to designate family members or friends to read them out. Make sure they practice beforehand!

If one side of the family has strong linguistic ties with a non-English speaking country then try to include a suitable poem in that language, so that they feel included and respected.

At the end of the ceremony the families may wish you to say a few words explaining the principles of Islamic marriage. Make sure you leave everyone with a higher respect for Islam! I have seen young Muslims giggling and laughing during imams' speeches at weddings. Do not refer to the physical aspects of marriage in any way.

The modern English habit of allowing family and friends to give speeches is best avoided, since few people nowadays are gifted at public speaking, and family reminiscences are often embarrassing and detract from the essential dignity of the occasion.

Ensure before the ceremony that the *mahr* has been agreed, that the bride has given her consent, and that the two witnesses have been designated and are aware of their role. Make sure everyone knows that the *nikah* document has no legal force, and that only marriages solemnised by a registrar or other legally 'authorised person' have legal effect in the UK.

Prepare beforehand and ensure that you are entirely familiar with all the names of those concerned.

Keep any notes in an attractive notebook, rather than holding loose sheets of paper. Dress in a recognisably 'Islamic' way, rather than in Western clothes.

Do not accept any payment, but suggest a donation to your mosque or other charity. Have a printed sheet of paper with the bank account details ready to give to anyone who asks.

Fill out the *nikah* document after the ceremony rather than during the proceedings, as this is a time-consuming process which will detract from the dignity of the procedure.

Before you begin, remember your Lord, and pray for success and reverence throughout the ceremony. You are representing Islam to very many people, who will remember this day.

What follows is an example of the nikahs which I have carried out and which have been well received by attendees.

2.

FORM OF MARRIAGE

for the wedding of

Alina and Abdul Qadir

Seven Sisters Dergah
277 St Anne's Road
London N15 5RG

Saturday 9 May

Witnesses: Dr Alamgir Hussain
Mr Qamaruddin Andrew Norris

Wali: Father of the Bride: Mr Imdadul Hasan Choudhrey

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
هُوَ الْمُؤَلَّفُ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِ الْعِبَادِ

[*CELEBRANT:*]

I bid you welcome; be at peace.

May I request that everyone present switch their phones to silent mode, please?

On this solemn day we call to witness God and His angels, and this gathering, as this betrothed pair stand before the almighty Creator to enter the blessed door of marriage. What hitherto was apart, today is joined; what was distance is now unity; what was two minds is now

made one.

Even as were Ali and Fatima, so let them be. Even as were Uthman and Ruqaiyyah, so let them be. Even as were al-Hasan and Khawla, so let them be. Even as were al-Husayn and Shahr Banu, so let them be.

Almighty God has said: *wa-khalaqnakum azwaja*. We have created you as pairs. Not alone is our mortal course; but in companionship and in sacrifice. And the Holy Prophet has said: *al-'irq dassas*, Heredity is true; so let each of you look to where he shall wed.

The *shajara* of our forefathers is not at an end; to this *nashhad*, we bear witness. The *shajara* of our descendants shall come to be, by God's leave. To this *nashhad*, we bear witness. The wisdom of two families is today conjoined; may God give each the best of the other, bringing forth a generation that honours their first parents Adam and Hawwa, *alayhima's-salam*.

[READING ONE - Sameer Badat:]

The Beneficent.

Hath made known the Qur'an.

He hath created humanity.

He hath taught them speech.

The sun and the moon are made punctual.

The stars and the trees prostrate.

And the sky He hath uplifted; and He hath set the balance,

That ye exceed not the balance,

But observe the balance strictly, nor fall short thereof.

And the earth hath He appointed for living things,

Wherein are fruit and sheathed palm-trees,

Husked grain and scented herb.

Which is it, of the favours of your Lord, that you deny?

[Q 55:1-13]

[CELEBRANT:]

On earth we stand, and of the earth is our life. The shining sky, the wind and the slanting rain; red sun and silver moon, all move in His glory, and new life comes to be for us as it does for all creatures. In nature we are one with creation and its eternal Lord. The cycle of the seasons shows forth His sign and wisdom; from rain and soil, mist and star, the river of life, *jalal* and *jamal*, a new and bright springtime.

To the generations of souls which are to come, made lawful by this day, we commend this union, in our humble and broken prayer that Almighty God shall grant an auspicious fecundity and a blessed sustenance.

Hear His word:

And it is of His signs that He created for you from your own kind, spouses, that you might find peace in them, and He appointed love and mercy between you. Truly in this are signs for a people who reflect.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ نَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَسَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يَضِلَّ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَ أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ، بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ حِينَ تُمْسُونَ وَحِينَ تُصْبِحُونَ * وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَعَشِيًّا وَحِينَ تُظْهِرُونَ * يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَيُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَكَذَلِكَ تُخْرَجُونَ * وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ بَشَرٌ تَنْتَشِرُونَ * وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافَ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ : النَّكَاحُ سُنَّتِي فَمَنْ رَغِبَ عَنْ سُنَّتِي فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي

صَدَقَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

Could the witnesses please identify themselves?

Dr Alamgir Hussain
Mr Qamaruddin Andrew Norris

We now proceed to the contract. Abdul Qadir, can you please direct these words to the bride's *wali*.

[Groom takes hand of the *wali*]

[GROOM:]

I, Abdul Qadir, son of Qamaruddin Andrew Norris, son of David Norris, seek the hand in marriage, of your precious daughter, Alina, according to the Book of Allah, and the Sunna of the Messenger of Allah, and with the mahr disbursal which has been agreed between us.

انا ، عبدُ القادرِ ابنُ قَمَرِ الدينِ اُنْدَرُ نُريْسِ ابنِ دَافيدِ نُوريسِ اَلْتَمِسُ الزَّوْجَ بِكَرِيْمَتِكُمْ اَليْنَةَ
بِنْتِ اِمْدَادِ الحَسَنِ ابنِ تاجِ الدينِ جَاوَدِري عَلَي كِتَابِ اللهِ وَسُنَّةِ رَسُوْلِ اللهِ وَيَا اَلْاَجْرَ المَسْمِي
بَيْنَنَا

[WALI:]

قَبِلْتُ

I consent.

[GROOM:]

نَكَحْتُهَا

I marry her.

[CELEBRANT:]

اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ لِكُلِّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا فِي صَاحِبِهِ

O Lord God, we have witnessed now the union of Your servants, Abdul Qadir and Alina. Grant them peace and joy in one another, that they may thereby grow in love and knowledge of Your name. Bestow upon them, Lord, health in their bodies, a prosperity in this world which pleases You, and help them in their pilgrimage together, as

they follow the steep road of Your prophets and saints. May they know the blessing of parenthood, and give You thanks for the miracle of new life.

And we ask You, O Lord of the Worlds, that they be a support one to another upon this road of life; a sure remedy and comfort in times of hardship, a shield against the arrows of fortune, and a sign of hope to those less fortunate than themselves.

All this we ask, Lord, that Thy plan may be fulfilled, as the world's sorrows and her injuries are healed by the soft but strong hand of love, and as the gift of fruitfulness brings forth a new and faithful generation, that the earth may once more be made young as all nations celebrate Your name.

Again, O Lord, O Lord of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, accept our thanks. Make Abdul Qadir and Alina, their families and kin, and all this company, celebrate joyfully the gift of love, and the good world that is the work of Your hand.

[*READING TWO - Nadia Ashrif:*]

May your marriage bring you all the exquisite excitements a marriage should bring, and may life grant you also patience, tolerance, and understanding.

May you always need one another - not so much to fill your emptiness as to help you to know your fullness. A mountain needs a valley to be complete; the valley does not make the mountain less, but more; and the valley is more a valley because it has a mountain towering over it. So let it be with you and you.

May you need one another, but not out of weakness.

May you want one another, but not out of lack.

May you entice one another, but not compel one another.

May you embrace one another, but not encircle one another.

May you succeed in all important ways with one another, and not fail in the little graces.

May you look for things to praise, often say, "I love you!" and take no notice of small faults.

If you have quarrels that push you apart, may both of you hope to have good sense enough to take the first step back.

May you enter into the mystery which is the awareness of one another's presence - no more physical than spiritual, warm and near when you are side by side, and warm and near when you are in separate rooms or even distant cities.

May you have happiness, and may you find it making one another happy.

May you have love, and may you find it loving one another!

[James Dillet Freeman]

[*READING THREE - Marie Tovey:*]

My true love hath my heart, and I have his.
By just exchange, one for the other given.
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss,
There never was a better bargain driven.
His heart in me keeps me and him in one.
My heart in him his thoughts and senses guides;
He loves my heart, for once it was his own,
I cherish his, because in me it bides.
His heart his wound received from my sight,
My heart was wounded with his wounded heart;
For as from me on him his hurt did light,
So still methought in me his hurt did smart.
Both equal hurt, in this change sought our bliss:
My true love hath my heart and I have his.

[Sir Philip Sidney]

[*READING FOUR - Imdadul Hasan Choudhrey:*]

God's wisdom in His destiny and decree has created love among mankind.

That foreordainment has paired all parts of the world, and set them in love with their spouses.

Every part of this world yearns for its partner, just as straw is drawn to amber.

Heaven says to the earth: 'O wonder! You draw me like iron to a magnet!'

The female is drawn to the male so that they may perfect each other's work.

God placed yearning within men and women so that through their partnership the world might go on.

[Jalal al-Din Rumi]

[READING FIVE - Hossein Oweidah:]

His love for Heaven grows this day, for Heaven's in her face.
Her longing for the Garden knows him as her resting-place.
The spheres of fate decree that two have now become as one.
A tale as old as Adam's when man's story was begun.
The fragrance of that Garden's herbs this gathering unite,
So memory of Eden's realm may bathe us in its light!
As all the Prophets with their spouses praised the Lord of All
May we, now gathered here, our vows and promises recall.
Sincerity, humility, and service please the Lord -
His Chosen One has warned us of the vices He abhorred.
May joy that is His will for every heart that follows him,
Whelm all in bliss and fill the cup of union to the brim!
This secret's out: though all do seek a life of tranquil joy,
That soul is glad which doing all its duty can enjoy.
So praise the Lord of all the Worlds! His promises are true.
Obey His Law, thy spouse adore, give every soul its due.

[Namik Kemal]

[CELEBRANT:]

اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ فِيهِمَا وَعَلَيْهِمَا وَاجْمَعْ بَيْنَهُمَا فِي خَيْرِ
اللَّهُمَّ آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ
رَبَّنَا لَا تُرْغِ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

اللَّهُمَّ ثَبِّتْ قَلْبَيْهِمَا عَلَى دِينِكَ وَاشْرَحْ صَدْرَيْهِمَا بِمَحَبَّتِكَ وَأَيْدِيَهُمَا عَلَى صِرَاطِكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ

[Then any other Arabic prayers suited to the occasion]

وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا وَمَوْلَانَا وَحَبِيبِنَا وَشَفِيعِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَأَنْصَارِهِ وَأَزْوَاجِهِ
وَذُرِّيَّتِهِ وَسَلَّم تَسْلِيمًا كَثِيرًا

الْفَاتِحَةَ

[CELEBRANT:]

The ceremony ends here; our warm congratulations to the bride and groom!

[The ceremony should end at this point. Some couples nowadays insist on vows, which are not part of the Muslim tradition, but which are not offensive to it; hence these can be included as a *mubah* matter, *mustahabb* if they serve the da'wa process. This should take place immediately after the groom pronounces the words, 'I marry her'.]

Exchange of Vows

[CELEBRANT:]

Do you, Abdul Qadir Norris, agree that Alina Choudhrey, should be your wedded wife, and that you shall honour, love and respect her, and be faithful unto her, in conformity with the law and will of Almighty God?

[GROOM:]

Yes, I do.

[CELEBRANT:]

Do you, Alina Choudrey, agree that Abdul Qadir Norris should be your wedded husband, and that you shall honour, love and respect him, and be faithful unto him, in conformity with the law and will of Almighty God?

[BRIDE:]

Yes, I do.