

## DEFINITION OF WALIMAH

The word *walimah* is an Arabic word derived from *walam*, which means to join or unite. A *walimah* is called such because it is an occasion when two individuals unite with each other.<sup>1</sup> The term *walimah* is used at several places in the hadith of Nabi Muhammed (sallallahu alayhi wasallam). For example, after the consummation of his nikah to Hazrat Safiyyah (radhiyallahu anhaa), when the dates and other titbits were placed on the leather table-cloth that he preferred to use, The Messenger of Allah said to the Sahabah: “*Eat of the Walimah of your mother.*”<sup>2</sup>

*Walimah* is the feast given by the husband after nikah. The eating or feast hosted by the bride’s party is not a called *walimah*, as will be discussed later in this article. It is established from numerous ahadeeth that Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) commanded the husband, not the bride or her party, to provide the eating after the nikah. When Abdur Rahmaan bin Auf (radhiyallahu anhu) got married, The Messenger of Allah told him: “*Make a walimah, even if you have to slaughter a goat.*” (Bukhari) When Hazrat Ali (Radhiyallahu anhu) married Hazrat Fatima (radhiyallahu anhaa) he was told by The Messenger of Allah: “*A marriage should have a walimah.*” (Ahmad) There are countless examples in the lives of the Sahaaba where the husband was saddled with the duty of providing a *walimah* after his marriage.

According to most Ulema a *walimah* is food served on the occasion of nikah, whilst a smaller group of Ulema maintain that *walimah* is any meal given on a joyous or happy occasion.<sup>3</sup> The Hanafi Scholars have adopted the first view.

## THE TIME OF THE WALIMAH

There is consensus among Scholars that a *walimah* is the meal provided after nikah. However, they differ as to the exact

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<sup>1</sup> *Naylul Owtaar* :198

<sup>2</sup> *HAyaatus Sahaabah*

<sup>3</sup> *I’laa-us Sunan* 11:12

time that the walimah should be observed. According to some Maliki Ulema it is mustahabb to provide this eating when the couple meet, with actual consummation occurring **after** the walimah.<sup>4</sup> The Hanafi Ulema have preferred the view that a walimah should be held **after** consummation of the nikah. It is, though, permissible for a man to host a walimah immediately after his nikah, before consummation of the marriage. But to host the walimah on the day after the marriage has been consummated is actually the proper sunnat procedure since all the walimahs of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) were conducted in this manner.

### **KHALWAT-E-SAHEEHA OR CONSUMMATION**

In Shariah, consummation of nikah is the meeting of husband and wife in seclusion under such circumstances that there is no Shar'ee or physical obstacle preventing the two from sexual intercourse. A Shar'ee impediment preventing sexual intercourse will be a faradh or waajib fast being observed by either one of the spouses, or the wife being in the state of haidh, etc. A physical impediment will be an illness that prevents the two from copulating, or a fault in one of the two parties that makes sex abhorrent or unbearable. Once this is understood, it is clear that consummation of nikah in Islam does not necessarily mean that the newly weds should indulge in sexual intercourse. As long as they meet under circumstances that are **conducive** to having sex with each other, the nikah will be considered to be consummated even if actually intercourse did not take place. After such consummation, it becomes sunnat to host the walimah, which should be done the following day.

### **A COMMON MISTAKE**

Based on the explanation of how a marriage is consummated in Islam we feel it imperative to highlight an anomaly related to the walimah that sometimes occurs nowadays.

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<sup>4</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:11.

It happens that a boy and girl marry but do not begin living together as husband and wife straight after the nikah. Instead they may do so after a few months or a year. This is done for a number of reasons related to studies, work, arranging a dwelling, etc. In such an instance, the boy (husband) will only give his walimah the day he starts living together with his wife. From a Shariah point of view there is nothing wrong in a couple marrying now and living together as husband and wife six months or a year later. This is totally permissible. However, in most cases of this nature somewhere along the line the couple will certainly meet in seclusion. If this meeting of theirs fits the Shar'ee definition of *khalwat-e-saheeha* as described above (and in most cases it does), it means that their marriage has been consummated. When the marriage has been consummated the walimah is supposed to follow the day thereafter. Yet we are well aware that this groom will only give his walimah a few weeks or months later. It therefore means that he has missed out on the sunnat walimah; instead the feast he eventually gives some months down the line cannot be described as a walimah; it is just an ordinary meal. The sunnat walimah is the feast that follows consummation of the nikah, whereas this feast came several days or even months after the couple had consummated their nikah by meeting in seclusion. Parents and prospective husbands should take note of this and figure out means of overcoming the problem.

A second problem similar to the one just mentioned, is the practice of hosting the walimah a week after the nikah has been solemnized. This generally happens when the man marries a girl from another town. Normally marriages are conducted on Sundays. The same day or the next the groom returns home with his new bride, and only gives the walimah the following Sunday in his home town. If the couple had consummated the marriage the same night after the Nikah had been solemnized in the bride's hometown, then the walimah should have been given the very next day. Sometimes the newly wedded couple will spend the night at a holiday inn or hotel, thus consummating their nikah; hence the walimah should have been held the next day. If the

nikah was consummated in the husband's town, then too, the walimah should follow a day thereafter. However, this 'walimah' does not occur the day after consummation. Instead, it takes place one whole week after the marriage has been consummated. From the definition of a walimah stated by the Muslim Jurists and Imams, such an eating or meal does not constitute a sunnat walimah but is just an ordinary feast. The groom will not receive the thawaab or reward of a walimah.

### **Suggested alternatives**

To overcome this common happening that deprives us of the reward of a sunnat walimah we offer two suggestions. One is to give the walimah the very next day after consummation of nikah and not to wait till the Sunday. If a meal is given at night, for example, one may still be able to invite as many people as desired. In this way the sunnat walimah is fulfilled for it would have then occurred **after** consummation of the nikah. The other alternative is to provide a walimah immediately after the nikah. As mentioned earlier, the food given from the husband's side straight after the nikah is also considered as a walimah. Generally it is the girl's party that provides the feast after a nikah. In fact this feast is far more elaborate and lavish than the actual walimah. What we suggest in an attempt to overcome the abovementioned discrepancy is that an agreement be reached between the two parties whereby the husband's group will contribute a sum of money towards the eating hosted by the girl's party after the nikah. This contribution by the husband and his family must be done with an intention of walimah. In other words, the eating provided after the nikah will now be shared by both parties. In this sharing, the husband's intention will be walimah, so at least the sunnat act of a walimah will be fulfilled. This may sound strange and out of place, but if people really wish to practice on the sunnah, they will stop at nothing to attain this. If negations are made in advance, this can definitely be achieved. When the husband goes back to his hometown, he may still host a walimah there the next day, so that his friends and families who were

unable to attend the nikah may be invited and honoured. As we shall mention further on, the walimah can be spread over more than one day.

Some might argue that this arrangement entails extra expense, for the husband will have to contribute money towards the eating that was given immediately after the nikah, and then he still has to pay for the walimah in his hometown. Well, in most weddings people generally spend a lot on unnecessary arrangements such as wedding cards, hiring a hall, hiring dishes and tables, hiring a marquee, etc. Here we are spending money to ensure that we fulfill an important sunnah of Nabi-e-Kareem (sallallahu alayhi wasallam). The Ulema have classified the walimah as a sunnat-e-muakkada. Costs, therefore should, not be present a major problem. Besides, the sum contributed towards this eating does not have to be huge neither does the second walimah on the following day have to be a big affair. Unfortunately, due to the trend that we have set for ourselves, all these arrangements become costly, while in reality they need not be so expensive. A simple meal of one type of food with hand made roti or served with rice, or even tea and cake can suffice as a walimah.

## **THE SHAR'EE STATUS OF WALIMAH**

The Ulema are unanimous that a walimah is an established sunnah practice of Shariah, since Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) commanded people to observe this practice and he did so himself.<sup>5</sup> For this reason the Ulema term it a *sunnah muakkadah* practice.<sup>6</sup> Some Shaafi'ee jurists have stated that to observe the walimah feast is waajib, while according to all other math-habs it is sunnah and not waajib. It is clear, though, that this practice should not be discarded unless there are strong reasons to do so.

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<sup>5</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:12

<sup>6</sup> *Fiqhul Islam Dr. Zuhaili* :125

## THE WALIMA INVITATION

To attend a walimah after being invited is certainly waajib according to all the Fuqahaa (Muslim Jurists). Again, a small group of Shaafi'ee Scholars aver that attending a walimah upon invitation is *faradh-e-kifaayah*, just as it is fardh-e-kifaayah for at least one person out of a group to reply to a salaam when the whole group was greeted with *assalaamu alaykum*.<sup>7</sup> It is important to remember that the wujoob or obligation of attending the walimah is conditioned with the following factors:

- a) One has received a personal invitation. If the groom issued a general invite, such as a public announcement stating *all welcome*, then it is not waajib upon any individual to accept the invitation.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore, clear that the organizers of a walimah should ensure that they issue personal invitations to whomever they intend calling to their feast and not generalize. After having invited people personally, if they wish to increase the number of attendants, then there is nothing wrong in making a general public invitation.
- b) The second condition is that no evil such as music, dancing, video filming, photography, intermingling of men and women, etc., be perpetrated at the walimah function. If any such evil occurs, then the guest is under no obligation to attend such a walimah. Likewise, one is under no obligation to attend a walimah where women come dressed immorally and revealingly.
- c) Rain, inclement weather, illness, or lack of transport is also a valid reason for not attending a walimah after being invited.

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<sup>7</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:13

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

- d) When there are clear signs that the organizers of the walimah are motivated by self-aggrandizement and showiness. Such signs are extravagance and squandering of exorbitant sums of money on arrangements on unnecessary and ostentatious activities.
- e) When it has become public knowledge that the major part of the host's income is from haraam sources, such as one who derives income from operating a brothel, casino, or night club, or one who is renowned for dealing in drugs, then to answer such a walimah invitation is not necessary.<sup>9</sup>

One who is in a position to stop or prevent an evil perpetrated at the walimah venue should attend and stop the wrong being committed. One who is not in such a position should not attend if it is known in advance that some evil or un-Islamic practice would take place at the walimah venue. If after entering the venue one notices that an evil which was unexpected is being committed then one is allowed to remain there and partake of the food. Those who are able to put a stop to the sin should do so. Those who cannot should eat quickly and take their leave. However, the Alim or Imam of a Musjid should not continue to remain there should some evil occur unexpectedly. By such leaders of the community remaining in a situation of sin, it will be almost tacit approval of the sin and a license to their followers to follow suit.<sup>10</sup>

## **ATTENDING THE WALIMAH**

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<sup>9</sup> *Fiqhul-Islam* 127

<sup>10</sup> *Raddul-Muhtaar*

The invitation extended is for one to be present at the walimah. This much is waajib. Once a person attends, he has fulfilled the haqq of his host, even if he does not eaten anything. Partaking of food is not necessary.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, if a person attends a walimah but declines to partake of the food, he has not violated any right or any law of Islam. However, one who does not wish to eat should at least make a short dua for the host before departing. It is though preferable that he eats a little bit of something on the table before leaving, for this will please the heart of his host.<sup>12</sup> One observing a nafl fast is allowed to break that fast if he attends a walimah, just to make his host's heart happy. He must fill in the qadha of that fast at some time later. When a nafl fast may be broken just to please the host, it will certainly be better to eat at least a tit-bit instead of just sitting a while and then leaving. It is not permissible to break a faradh or waajib fast just to eat upon an invitation.<sup>13</sup>

### **Invitations**

As regards invitations, Muslims should refrain from printing wedding cards. In Islam if an objective could be achieved through cost-saving means, it becomes necessary to adopt such money-saving methods, for the hadith states: *'Whenever Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) was given a choice between two matters, he would adopt the easier of the two.'* This applies to easiness as regards physicall accomplishment as well as easiness in terms of finance. It thus implies that he would opt for the cheaper option in the fulfillment of worldly aims and objectives. This concept is further bolstered by a hadith that particularly relates to marriage. The Noble Messenger of Allah stated: *"Verily, the marriage with the greatest blessing is that which incurs the least of expenses."* There are certainly cheaper ways of inviting people to a nikah than printing wedding cards.

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<sup>11</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:14

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



For example, printing one letter and then making as many photocopies as required, which can then be hand delivered to the invitees. The cost of this exercise is a fraction of the fancy wedding cards that people print.

Furthermore, the practice of inviting people through the medium of wedding cards has been adopted from the western kuffar. It thus becomes an act of imitation, which Islam calls *tashabbuh*. When there is an alternate practice available, then Islam prohibits us from adopting a method of the kuffar. Once when Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) saw a Sahaabi carrying a bow made by the Persians (who at that stage were fire-worshippers), he advised this Sahaabi to use a bow manufactured by Muslims. We explained above that there are other ways of extending invitations for a nikah, so a Muslim is not forced to resort to wedding cards. In the blessed time of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) people were invited either through personal invitations extended verbally, or through a messenger who would be sent to the homes of invitees. The Messenger of Allah sent Hazrat Anas (radhiyallahu anhu) to invite different tribes among the Sahaaba to his walimah when he married Hazrat Zainab (radhiyallahu anhaa).

If a walimah is being conducted for three days consecutively, then it is only waajib to attend on day one. On the second day attendance is mustahabb, and on the third day it is not even mustahabb.<sup>14</sup> Extending a walimah for more than one day will be discussed later.

## **THE FOOD OF A WALIMAH**

From a hadith cited earlier on we derive that it is permissible to slaughter a sheep or goat for the walimah feast, for this is what the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) advised Abdur Rahman bin Auf (radhiyallahu anhu). When the Messenger of Allah married Zaynab binti Jahsh (radhiyallahu anhaa), he too, slaughtered a sheep for his walimah, as is

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<sup>14</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:13.

mentioned in Saheeh Al-Bukhari. The Fuqahaa have mentioned that if one takes a share of one seventh in a cow or camel with the intention of using that meat for his walimah, whilst the other six partners intend qurbani with their shares, this is valid and lawful.<sup>15</sup>

However, this does not mean that one may not or should not offer guests at a walimah something simpler than a goat or sheep. Hazrat Ayesha (radhiyallahu anhaa) boasts about her walimah in the following words: “*Neither goats nor camels were slaughtered for my walimah!*” (Tibrani and Ahmed)<sup>16</sup> Let this be a point to ponder for the brides of today, who aspire for lavish and elaborate weddings. The modern-day bride boasts about opulence and luxury, while simplicity was an honour for the pious ladies of the past. The law is therefore, that any food offered to guests can serve the purpose of a walimah. It is reported by Imam Bukhari (rahmatullahi alayh) that in one of his marriages Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) cooked two *mudd* (approximately 1, 6 kgs) of barley and offered this to his guests. On the occasion of his nikah to Hazrat Safiyyah (radhiyallahu anhaa) the walimah consisted of about one kilogram of ajwah dates, as well as pieces of cheese, bread, and ghee contributed by various Sahaaba. There was no meat.<sup>17</sup>

From the above we also learn that it is permissible and in fact a sunnah for people to contribute food towards the walimah of another. This does not detract from such a feast being considered a walimah. When Hazrat Ali (radhiyallahu anhu) married The Queen of Jannah Fatima (radhiyallahu anhaa), a sheep was contributed by Sa’ad whilst several of the Ansaar brought barley and wheat. From this the walimah of Ali (radhiyallahu anhu) was prepared. This incident is recorded by Ibni Sa’ad and Tibraani.

## THE DURATION OF THE WALIMAH

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<sup>15</sup> *Raddul-Muhtaar*

<sup>16</sup> *Hayaatus Sahaabah vol 2.*

<sup>17</sup> *Hayaatus-Sahaabah*

It is permissible to extend the walimah to beyond one day. In fact, the walimah may be spread over seven days. However, the condition for such an extended walimah is that it should not be motivated by boastful showiness. A sign that the increase in number of days is not influenced by intentions of boastfulness and ostentation is that each day different people are invited to partake of the food. If the same people are invited on all the days of the extended walimah then this is considered ostentatious and an exhibition to impress people, in which case it will not be permissible. Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) gave a walimah of three days when he married Hazrat Safiyyah (radhiyallahu anhu).<sup>18</sup> Hafsa binti Sireen mentions that her father (who was a Taabi'ee) invited the Sahaaba for his walimah which lasted for seven days, and according to another narration, eight days.<sup>19</sup>

In Abu Dawood there appears a hadith that states: "*The first day of a walimah is established (in Islam), the second day is a common practice (among people), and the third day is show and ostentation.*"<sup>20</sup> This hadith shareef means that generally people extend the walimah for show and ostentation; hence we underlined this as a factor upon which hinged the permissibility or prohibition of spreading the walimah over a few days. In the previous incident, the Sahaaba attended a walimah that lasted for seven or eight days because they were well aware that the organizer of the walimah was not doing so to show and impress people.

## **INVITING THE POOR TO THE WALIMA**

Hazrat Abu Huraira (radhiyallahu anhu) narrates that Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) said: "*The worst meal is that to which the wealthy are invited but the poor are left out.*" (Bukhari) We thus learn that for a walima to be considered good

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<sup>18</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:12

<sup>19</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:13

<sup>20</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:15

in the eyes of Allah, the poor should be invited as well. This makes for barakaat (special blessings) in the walimah.

### **THE EATING PROVIDED BY THE GIRL'S PARTY**

A practice referred to earlier is the feast that is commonly provided by the girl's party immediately after the nikah has been performed in the masjid. As emphasized earlier, this is not a walimah, because we have established that the walimah comes from the husband's side. In this eating the groom has got no say or involvement. The Ulema have mentioned that to host such a feast is totally permissible.<sup>21</sup> Some have furnished the marriage of Hazrat Umm-e-Habeebah (radhiyallahu anhaa) to Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) as a basis for the feast being discussed here, in an attempt to align it with the sunnah. This writer, however, respectfully disagrees with such a suggestion for reasons outlined hereunder. This incident is mentioned in the famous historical work *Al Bidayah wan-Nihaayah* by Allama Ibn Kathir, and it is also narrated by Imam Haakim. King Najaashi was requested by Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) via a letter to propose to Umme-Habeeba, the daughter of Abu Sufyaan, who at that stage had migrated from Makka to Abyssinia in a group of about 83 men and women. She was thus living under the asylum of King Najaashi, who it must be remembered had embraced Islam at the hands of the Sahaaba. When the proposal was accepted, Najaashi then went ahead and solemnized the nikah. Afterwards the audience wanted to disperse, but the King stopped them, saying: "*It is a sunnat of all Prophets, that food be served after a marriage.*"

Once it is understood that such an eating is not the sunnat walimah, it will follow that to accept the invitation to this feast is not waajib or mustahaab. Instead it will be permissible to accept and attend.

Furthermore, when the Shariah has prohibited wrong-doing and un-Islamic practices at a walimah, it will be far more

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<sup>21</sup> *I'laa-us Sunan* 11:11

important to ensure that such feasts from the girl's party remain free from sin and evil. Unfortunately, most of the corrupt practices and evil occur at these functions, especially when it takes place in halls and public venues. In the history of such feasts we have come across the following evils that were perpetrated at such functions:

- 1) Intermingling of men and women. At times there is absolutely no restraint among our Muslims. Young boys will deliberately look at the young girls who attend dressed immodestly and attractively. There will be exchange of discussion and messages, and sometimes actual physical contact.
- 2) Women will dress up expensively and ostentatiously to make an exhibition and spectacle of themselves. They will spend thousands on new outfits just to attend the wedding of someone else. The main purpose is to show off their finery and attract the attention of other women, and perhaps men-folk as well.
- 3) Music and singing.
- 4) Photography and videoing of the bride.
- 5) At times young huffaz are asked to render a qiraat of the Quran on stage. To recite Quran under those conditions is tantamount to disrespecting the Kalaam of Allah. This is a sin in itself.
- 6) Disregard for the sunnah en masse, because they all sit at tables, some eating with knives and forks.
- 7) Non-mehram men shaking hands with the bride, while the more shameless among them will kiss her.

If the above sins are committed at a walimah, the Shariah demands that such a walimah should be abandoned. How much more strict will the Shariah be when the feast that is not even a walimah is attended by the above conglomeration of evils? We appeal to Muslims to let Islamic sense prevail. Let us not cut the roots of our own existence. We quoted a hadith at the start of this treatise wherein we were advised that

blessings in a nikah can only come when expenses are minimized. All the above entail waste and extravagance, leaving our marriages bereft of all blessing. No wonder our marriages are so flimsy that they fall apart within months if not days.