

Marrying up to Four Wives (Polygyny), Western Legal Prohibition, and the Risks of Solely Islamic Nikah-Based Marriage

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I seek refuge in Allah from Satan, the accursed "A'udhu billahi min ash-shaytan ir-rajim".

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim"

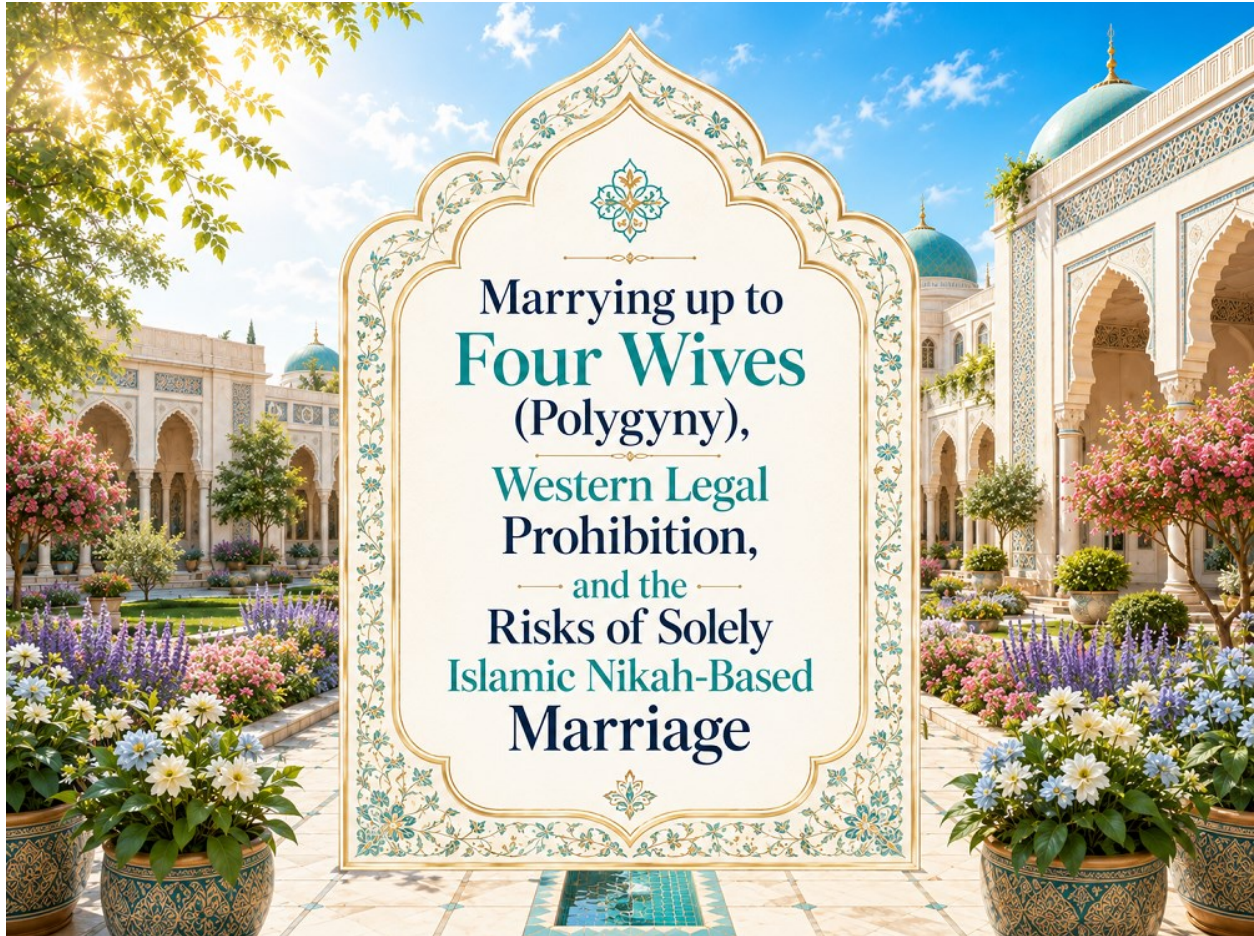
أعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ) النساء: 135

“O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives.” [Quran \(4:135\)](#)

This article does not deny that polygyny is lawful in Islam when its conditions are fulfilled. It warns against secretive, harmful, deceptive, or legally unprotected arrangements that may deny women their Islamic and civil rights.

Marriage in Islam is not merely feelings, private promises, or personal arrangements. Marriage carries rights, accountability, protection, responsibility, and public recognition.



This article is also advice and a warning for every Muslim woman, and even every non-Muslim woman, who is considering marriage, whether through a legally recognised civil marriage or through an Islamic marriage, “nikah”, only. Before any marriage is finalised, the woman and her guardian, “wali”, where applicable, should act responsibly and make reasonable enquiries about the prospective husband’s identity, financial condition, character, and general suitability for marriage.

This may include proof of identity, evidence regarding his financial stability, confirmation that he has not declared bankruptcy where relevant, recent payslips or other proof of income, and any relevant documentation showing his ability to meet marital responsibilities.

The woman and her guardian, “wali”, where applicable, should also take reasonable steps to protect her safety, dignity, and future. This may include requesting appropriate evidence that the prospective husband does not have sexually transmitted

diseases or serious undisclosed medical conditions that may affect marital life, intimacy, safety, or future family responsibilities.

It may also include requesting a current police check, especially to identify any serious criminal history, domestic violence record, abuse-related history, fraud, or other matters that may affect safety and trust. If the prospective husband and prospective wife intend to have children, they should also consider appropriate medical check-ups, where possible, to identify any known medical, hereditary, or genetic risks that may affect future children.

These precautions are not conditions for the validity of the Islamic marriage contract in themselves, but they are reasonable means of protection, honesty, and prevention of harm. They are part of tying one's camel before trusting in Allah, and they reflect the Islamic concern for responsibility, transparency, dignity, and safeguarding rights.

What Happens If You Become an “Unofficial” Second, Third, or Fourth Wife in a Country That Does Not Legally Recognise Polygyny?

(1) The Potential Absence of Spousal Rights: You may have no legal rights as a wife under the civil legal system. In the eyes of the government, you may not be recognised as a spouse, but only as an unrecognised partner. This is especially serious for women who have never been married, are divorced or widowed, are younger, or intend to start a family and have children.

(2) The Potential Consequence of No Civil Inheritance Rights: If he dies, you may receive nothing under the civil legal system. The legally recognised wife will usually have priority in inheritance processes, burial decisions, property matters, hospital access, insurance, and next-of-kin rights, unless other legally valid arrangements are in place or his family willingly ensures that your Islamic inheritance rights are fulfilled.

(3) The Potential Risk of No Financial or Custody Protection: Your children may face legal and financial complications depending on the circumstances, particularly where paternity, custody, housing, or benefits are disputed.

(4) You May Not Always Be Able to Travel Together: Many countries, including some Muslim-majority countries, may require proof of a valid marriage for matters

such as hotel stays, travel, residence, or family documentation. Being married without legally recognised documents may restrict your ability to travel or stay together with your spouse, unless you at least possess an Islamic nikah or marriage certificate, and even then, its recognition may depend on the country and institution involved.

(5) The Potential Loss of Healthcare Access and Medical Decision-Making

Rights: If you become sick, hospitalised, injured, or unable to speak for yourself, he may not have any recognised authority to make medical decisions on your behalf. Your care may instead be assigned to legally recognised relatives, appointed decision-makers, or the state.

(6) The Potential for No Hospital Visits: In some emergency situations where one spouse is injured, the other may be denied the right to visit them in hospital. Full visitation and decision-making rights are often reserved for legally recognised family members.

(7) The Potential for No Returns on Investment: You may spend years emotionally, financially, and practically invested in a relationship that can end suddenly, with no civil legal protections, no enforceable marital rights, and no security. However, even within a legally recognised marriage, there is no guarantee that a person will receive their full rights unless the spouse fears Allah and acts justly.

(8) No Clear Legal Protection: If the relationship is investigated legally, the man may protect himself by denying that you are his wife and saying, “I only have one wife. The others are girlfriends.” Think carefully about what that means.

(9) Potential Lack of Public Honesty or Transparency: The relationship may remain hidden from public view for years because it cannot be openly recognised under the law.

(10) The Increased Risk of a Non-Transparent Islamic Life: Unfortunately, in some Western contexts, only the legally recognised wife is publicly acknowledged, including within some local Muslim communities. The second, third, or fourth wife may be forced to live in secrecy and may be unable to live transparently even within her own Muslim community.

(11) The Potential Absence of Assets and Benefits: You may not be entitled to housing, assets, spousal support, survivor benefits, immigration sponsorship, insurance coverage, retirement benefits, or marital protections.

(12) Potentially No Clear Legal Standing: If a conflict arises between wives, whose marriage is recognised by the courts? Usually, the legally recognised wife. However, in some circumstances, significant legal effort may be required to establish recognition as a partner or claimant rather than as a legal wife, especially where the spouse was wealthy or left assets.

(13) The Potential Inequality Between Wives: It becomes extremely difficult for a man to maintain practical justice between all wives, as required by the Glorious Quran and the authentic Sunnah, if only one wife possesses full legal rights while the others are merely considered to be in a lawful Islamic marriage, “halal nikah”, and recognised as wives within Islamic practice only, while lacking enforceable civil protections. The hadith warns that a man who acts unjustly between his wives risks being resurrected on the Day of Judgement with one side of his body leaning or drooping.

(14) No Civilly Recognised Marriage Ceremony: Private religious ceremonies do not automatically override the laws of the country in which a person lives. Rights, protections, inheritance, custody, medical authority, and legal recognition usually depend on civil law in most Western countries.

(15) Lack of Proper or Publicly Accountable Witnesses: Marriages conducted in secrecy or underground, witnessed only by two of the groom’s male friends, may be at risk of serious religious and practical problems. The purpose of witnesses is not merely technical formality. Witnesses, the wali where required, public recognition, and proper documentation help protect accountability, responsibility, and the rights of both parties within the marriage contract. The validity of a marriage should not be discussed carelessly, because juristic details differ, but secrecy, concealment, deception, and denial of rights are contrary to the purpose and dignity of Islamic marriage.

(16) Legal Prohibition in Many Western Jurisdictions: Encouraging Muslim women, or even non-Muslim women, online to enter legally unrecognised relationships known as “Islamic nikah” without clearly explaining these risks can seriously affect their future, safety, dignity, finances, and children.

Stop risking your future, dignity, safety, and Hereafter for relationships built upon secrecy, loopholes, and technicalities.

Allah Is All-Knowing of the Truth of These Relationships

Unless you acknowledge and fully understand the risks associated with accepting the status of a second, third, or fourth wife through Islamic marriage, “nikah”, alone, yes, you may be Islamically married and not committing adultery, “zina”, provided that the Islamic requirements of marriage are genuinely fulfilled.

However, no one can deceive Allah Almighty through word games, empty promises without guarantees, and legal loopholes while living under existing legal systems. This is especially serious in countries where civil law does not permit or recognise polygyny.

Therefore, do not compromise your rights as a wife under the existing legal system or under Islamic Sharia. This does not apply where a woman, with full knowledge and without coercion, willingly chooses to forgo some of her rights in order to enter into marriage, provided that the Islamic marriage itself is valid and free from deception, oppression, and harm.

If marital rights are denied, concealed, or deliberately left unprotected, this may violate the obligations and objectives of the Islamic marriage contract.

If you do not possess legally recognised documentation in your country confirming your marriage to your husband, how can you prove that you are married? You may choose not to establish civil recognition of the marriage if that is your personal choice or part of a fully informed and voluntary agreement.

If a man has three wives, but only one marriage is legally recognised in a Western country, what is the legal status of the other two wives?

That means he has one legally recognised wife and two wives who are not recognised under civil law. In other words, one marriage is legally valid under the state system, while the remaining relationships are not legally recognised, even if they are considered lawful Islamic marriages, “halal nikah”, within Islamic practice.

That is what he may say to the government if investigated, so how do you think Allah, the All-Knowing, sees a relationship built on secrecy, denial, or the loss of rights?

Beware of Misinformed and Harmful Legal Advice

Stop asking for second-wife and third-wife advice in public spaces when you live in a state or country that prohibits or does not recognise polygyny, and stop giving such advice to others without clearly explaining the legal, financial, social, and religious consequences.

You may be encouraging sisters to enter arrangements that are not recognised by the laws of their regions and may expose them to serious legal, financial, and social harm. There are outsiders and hostile observers who monitor Muslim pages and may use such discussions to promote stereotypes that Muslims use religious loopholes to evade the law. This also gives other sisters the false impression that these relationships are always safe, simple, and Islamically responsible.

The reality must be stated clearly. What is permitted in Islamic Sharia must still be approached with wisdom, justice, responsibility, and awareness of the laws of the country in which a person lives. Muslims are not all living in Muslim-majority countries or legal systems that recognise polygyny.

People from other countries should not give careless or incorrect legal advice to Western sisters. They may not understand the laws, risks, social realities, or long-term consequences involved. A person who fears Allah should not encourage sisters to enter arrangements that may expose them to harm, secrecy, legal insecurity, or the loss of rights.

The Four-Wife Limit Was Revealed to Restrict Uncontrolled Polygyny and Hold Men Accountable, Not to Extend Desires Contrary to Popular Belief.

Before Islam, some men married many women without clear limits or proper accountability. Islam restricted polygyny to a maximum of four wives and tied that permission to justice, responsibility, and fear of Allah. This ruling was revealed by Allah in the Quran and conveyed by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. It was not revealed as a licence for men to pursue desire without responsibility.

The Quranic limit of four wives protected women by restricting uncontrolled polygyny and by requiring justice. It was not revealed as permission for men to oppress women, hide marriages, deny rights, or manipulate Islamic rulings.

Just because something may be legally or religiously permitted in principle does not mean it is wise, safe, or just in every circumstance. Under different legal, social, or personal conditions, polygyny may become harmful, oppressive, or practically impossible to conduct with justice.

Islamic Rulings and Hadiths Regarding These Particular Issues

“Marry other women of your choice—two, three, or four. But if you are afraid you will fail to maintain justice, then ‘content yourselves with’ one”

Surah An-Nisa, [Quran \(4:3\)](#).

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَتِلْكَ وَرُبْعٌ ۖ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةٌ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَذْنَىٰ ۖ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا ۝ ٣

And;

“Believers! It is not permissible for you to inherit women against their will¹ or mistreat them to make them return some of the dowry ‘as a ransom for divorce’—unless they are found guilty of adultery.² Treat them fairly. If you happen to dislike them, you may hate something which Allah turns into a great blessing.”

[Quran \(4:19\)](#)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَرِثُوا النِّسَاءَ كَرِهًا ۖ وَلَا تَعْضَلُوهُنَّ لِتَذْهَبُوا بِبَعْضِ مَا ءَاتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَنَّ بِفَحِشَةٍ مُّبِينَةٍ ۚ وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ فَإِنْ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا ۝ ١٩

Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:

Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "The believers who show the most perfect Faith are those who have the best behaviour, and the best of you are those who are the best to their wives".

[At-Tirmidhi, who categorized it as Hadith Hasan Sahih].

وعن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال : قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم "أكمل المؤمنين إيماننا أحسنهم خُلُقًا، وخياركم خياركم لنسائهم" ((رواه الترمذي وقال : حديث حسن صحيح)).

Reference: [Riyad as-Salihin 278](#)

And

Aisha reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, **“Announce this marriage publicly, conduct it in the mosque, and strike the drums for it.”**

Source: [Sunan al-Tirmidhi 1089](#)

Grade: *Hasan* (fair) according to Al-Zurqani

Ibn Taymiyyah said, “Malik obligated announcing the marriage. A secret marriage is a type of prostitution.

Allah Almighty said: **Chaste women, neither fornicators, nor secret mistresses, [Quran \(4:25\)](#).** A secret marriage is a type of secret mistress.”

Source: Majmū' al-Fatāwá 32/102

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ قَالَتْ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَعْلِنُوا هَذَا النِّكَاحَ وَاجْعَلُوهُ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ وَاضْرِبُوا عَلَيْهِ بِالذُّفُوفِ

سنن الترمذي كتاب النكاح باب ما جاء في إعلان النكاح 1089

المحدث الزرقاني خلاصة حكم المحدث حسن في مختصر المقاصد 114

قال ابن تيمية وَمَالِكٌ يُوجِبُ إِعْلَانَ النِّكَاحِ وَنِكَاحُ السِّرِّ هُوَ مِنْ جِنْسِ نِكَاحِ الْبَغَايَا وَقَدْ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مُحْصَنَاتٍ غَيْرَ مُسَافِحَاتٍ وَلَا مُتَّخِذَاتِ أَخْدَانٍ فَنِكَاحُ السِّرِّ مِنْ جِنْسِ ذَوَاتِ الْأَخْدَانِ

مجموع الفتاوى 32/102

And

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, **“Whoever has two wives and he inclines to one of them over the other, he will come on the Day of Resurrection with one of his sides collapsed.”**

Source: [Sahih Ibn Hibban 4207](#)

Grade: **Sahih** (authentic) according to Al-Arna'ut

Imam al-Shafi'i said, “I prefer for a man to limit himself to one wife, even though it is permissible to have more, due to the saying of the Almighty: **But if you are afraid you will fail to maintain justice, then content yourselves with one,**” [Quran \(4:3\)](#).

Source: al-Bayān fi Madhhab al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī 11/189

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ مَنْ كَانَتْ لَهُ امْرَأَتَانِ فَمَالَ مَعَ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَى جَاءَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَاحِدٌ شَقِيهٍ سَاقِطٌ

صحيح ابن حبان باب القسم ذكر وصف عقوبة من لم يعدل بين امرأتيه في الدنيا 4207

المحدث شعيب الأرنؤوط خلاصة حكم المحدث إسناده صحيح في تخريج صحيح ابن حبان 10/7

قَالَ الشَّافِعِيُّ وَأَحَبُّ لَهُ أَنْ يَقْتَصِرَ عَلَى وَاحِدَةٍ وَإِنْ أُبِيحَ لَهُ أَكْثَرُ لِقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً

البيان في مذهب الإمام الشافعي باب نفقة الزوجات مسألة الاقتصار على زوجة 11/189

And

Yahya related to me from Malik from Abu'z-Zubayr al-Makki that a case was brought to Umar about a marriage which had only been witnessed by one man and one woman. He said, "This is a secret marriage and I do not permit it. Had I been the first to come upon it, I would have ordered them to be stoned."

وَحَدَّثَنِي عَنْ مَالِكٍ، عَنْ أَبِي الزُّبَيْرِ الْمَكِّيِّ، أَنَّ عُمَرَ بْنَ الْخَطَّابِ، أُتِيَ بِنِكَاحٍ لَمْ يَشْهَدْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَةٌ
فَقَالَ هَذَا نِكَاحُ السِّرِّ وَلَا أُجِيزُهُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُ تَقَدَّمْتُ فِيهِ لَرَجَمْتُ .

USC-MSA web (English) reference: [Book 28, Hadith 26](#)

Arabic reference: Book 28, Hadith 1120

Tie Your Camel and Trust in Allah:

Anas ibn Malik reported: A man said, “O Messenger of Allah, should I tie my camel and trust in Allah, or should I leave her untied and trust in Allah?” The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “**Tie her and trust in Allah.**”

Source: [Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2517](#)

Grade: *Hasan* (fair) according to Al-Albani

Imam Ibn Rajab commented, “Its meaning is that a person employs wisdom and strives through permissible means, then places his trust in Allah after making his effort. All of this indicates that reliance upon Allah does not contradict adopting worldly means. Rather, combining the two may in fact be better.”

Source: Jāmi’ al-‘Ulūm wal-Hikam 2/507

عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اعْقُلْهَا
وَتَوَكَّلْ

سنن الترمذي كتاب صفة القيامة والرقائق والورع 2517

المحدث الألباني خلاصة حكم المحدث حسن في صحيح الجامع 1068

قال ابن رجب ومعناه أن الإنسان يأخذ بالكَيْس والسعي في الأسباب المباحة ويتوكَّل على الله بعد سعيه وهذا كله إشارة إلى أن التوكل لا يُنافي الإتيان بالأسباب بل قد يكون جمعهما أفضلَ

جامع العلوم والحكم الحديث التاسع والأربعون 2/507

There is context to each of these unofficial marriages and how they come about. Classical scholars discussed “secret marriages” and often condemned them because they resemble illicit relationships through secrecy, concealment, and the denial of rights.

Many scholars held that a marriage hidden from the community is sinful, invalid according to some conditions and schools, or at least highly blameworthy. Hiding wives in order to avoid responsibility is oppression, and using polygyny deceptively violates the Islamic requirement of justice.

The Point of Islamic Marriage Is:

- (a) Worship of Allah through a lawful and honourable relationship.
- (b) Chastity and protection from adultery, “zina”, and immoral relationships.
- (c) Tranquillity, love, “mawaddah”, mercy, “rahmah”, and emotional stability between husband and wife.
- (d) Protection of lineage, family structure, and children.
- (e) Lawful intimacy with dignity, responsibility, and modesty.
- (f) Cooperation upon righteousness, obedience to Allah, and moral uprightness.
- (g) Kind treatment, compassion, and living together honourably.
- (h) Justice, especially where polygyny is involved.
- (i) Fulfilment of marital duties and preservation of each spouse’s rights.
- (j) Protection.

- (k) Accountability.
- (l) Witnesses.
- (m) Rights.
- (n) Dignity.
- (o) Fairness, not secrecy, manipulation, loss of rights, or abandonment.

This article is not a formal fatwa or legal advice. Anyone considering such an arrangement should seek qualified Islamic guidance from reliable Sunni Muslim scholars and independent legal advice in their own jurisdiction before proceeding.

Allah Knows Best.

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