



Iranian Wedding Traditions

Iranian marriage is a cultural event which goes back to the Zoroastrian era , i.e., 2500 B.C. Although the traditions have changed drastically over years and under influence of different cultures, it is still the most conspicuous of all the occasions and is celebrated in the presence of a fairly large assembly. In the past the parents and older members of the family arranged almost all marriages. This is still the case in rural areas and with traditional families. Modern couples however, choose their own mate but their parents' consent is still very important and is considered by both sides. Even with modern Iranians, after the couple have decided themselves, it is normally the grooms' parents who take the initiative and formally ask for the bride and her family's consent.

Once the groom and his family express their desire for the union, they go to the brides' home with flowers, sweets and sometimes-gold coins or jewelry and ask for her hand. The couple becomes engaged in a reasonably lavish party. Rings are exchanged; the engagement rings are simple, mainly gold with no stones. While the wedding ring presented to the bride will be lavish expensive with precious stones.

There are two stages to a Persian marriage. Most often both take place on the same day, but occasionally there could be some time between the two. The first is called "Aghd", the legal process of getting married, when both the bride and bridegroom and their guardians sign a marriage contract. The second stage is "Jashn-e Aroosi", the wedding reception - the actual feasts and the celebrations, which traditionally lasted from 3 to 7 days.

The ceremony takes place in a specially decorated room with flowers and a beautiful and elaborately decorated spread on the floor called "Sofreh-ye Aghd". Traditionally Sofreh-ye Aghd is set on the floor facing east, the direction of sunrise (light). Consequently when

bride and bridegroom are seated at the head of Sofreh-ye Aghd they will be facing "The Light".

By custom, Aghd would normally take place at bride's parents/guardians home. The arrival of the guests, who are to be witnesses to the marriage of the couple, initiates the wedding ceremony. Traditionally the couples' guardians and other elder close family members are present in the room to greet the guests and guide them to their seats. After all the guests are seated the bridegroom is the first to take his seat in the room at the head of Sofreh-ye Aghd. The bride comes afterwards and joins the bridegroom at the head of Sofreh-ye Aghd. The bridegroom always sits on the right hand side of the bride. In Zoroastrian culture the right side designates a place of respect.



Persian Wedding Spread - Persian Wedding Sofreh Aghd

The spread that is used on the floor as the backdrop for Sofreh-ye Aghd was traditionally passed from mother to daughter. The spread is made of a luxurious fabric such as "Termeh" (Cashmere: A rich gold embroidered fabric originally made in Cashmere, Tibet, and the Himalayas), "Atlas" (Gold embroidered satin) or "Abrisham" (Silk). The main elements that are put on Sofreh are:

Mirror (of fate) "Aayeneh-ye Bakht" and two Candelabras (representing the bride and groom and brightness in their future) one on either side of the mirror. The mirror and two candelabras are symbols of light and fire, two important elements in the Zoroastrian culture.

A tray of seven multi-colored herbs and spices "Sini-ye Aatel-O-Baatel" to guard the couple and their lives together against the evil eye, witchcraft and to drive away evil spirits.

A scarf or shawl made out of silk or any other fine fabric to be held over the bride and bridegroom's head throughout the ceremony by various happily married female relatives

Two sugar cones "Kalleh Ghand" grinded together above the bride and bridegroom's head (over the scarf held above their heads) throughout the ceremony to shower them in sugar (symbolizing sweetness and happiness).

A copy of the couple's Holy Book is placed on the spread. This symbolizes God's blessing for the couple.

The marriage ceremony marks the most significant ritual for all Iranians specially the women. The wedding feast is the most elaborate in the couples' life. A few dishes are always present and the rest varies with the locality and the budget. All modern Iranians use wedding cakes this tradition is borrowed from the Europeans. The rest of the evening will be spent dancing, feasting and having a good time. There will be more parties given by close relatives and friends for the next few weeks. These parties are called paghosah, meaning clearing the path. They are to introduce the two newly related families to each other.

It is customary for the newlyweds to be the first to visit their parents on No Ruz and to be visited by other relatives because it is their first New Year as a couple. The couple would normally receive special gifts such as flowers, sweets, fruits and expensive fabrics. Iranian Muslims do not marry at certain Islamic months like Muharram and Safar. The first one is a

month of mourning for Imam Husayn and his Cheleh or fortieth day of death happens in Safar. No celebrations normally take place in Muharram.