

V.I.P. ARTICLE SUBMITTED BY:

Sinan Ertemel
Ph.D. Student in Economics
Rice University



Turkish Wedding Customs

After the decision that a young man is to marry has been taken, the journey begins with looking for a potential bride. In the traditional setting, parents of the prospective groom take a leading role in the search for a bride. However this situation has started to change recently. Young people themselves choose the people whom they will marry after dating them, or the decision is taken together with the family.

In the form of marriage that is initiated by “viewing visits”, the mother of the boy and women close to the family visit the home of the girl. If they like the girl, she is then shown to the groom. If he also likes her, the family decides to officially ask her family for her hand. The prominent women and men from the family visit the girl’s family to ask for her hand according to the command of God and the word of the Prophet at a previously determined sacred date (Thursdays and Sundays are generally considered days of good omen). Yet since the girl’s home is expected to be a place of modesty, the girl’s family does not give its consent on the first visit. A few visits to ask for the girl’s hand are made, giving the family of the girl enough time to think about it. If the family gives its consent, a verbal agreement to betrothal is made. In accordance with the request of the two sides, the bride and groom may put on their engagement rings on the same day, and this is sometimes done at an engagement ceremony held separately. After verbal agreement to betrothal has been made, the Turkish coffee is served. The quality and presentation of the Turkish coffee shows the prospective bride’s talent as a housewife.



Figure 1- Turkish coffee

After both sides have completed their preparations, an engagement ceremony is held at the girl's home, generally with the women in attendance. The man's family hands over the jewelry and other gifts purchased for the girl; in return, her family also gives presents. The ceremony can include an engagement feast if the sides so wish.

The next stage after the engagement is the wedding. The ceremony held one day before the wedding in the home of bride and groom is called the henna night. It generally takes place at the girl's home and among women, although either side can elect to host it.

On the henna night, or a few days earlier, the trousseau is taken from the girl's home and brought to the man's, and the bridal chamber is prepared. The trousseau is sometimes exhibited to the guests for a few days in the girl's home before the wedding and in the man's home during and after it. It is a widespread tradition that someone sits on the

trousseau chest, asking for a tip as it is taken from the girl's home. In addition, in the early hours of the day the henna night is to be held, a group of women from the bridegroom's family take the henna that will be placed on the bride's hands and feet, her clothes and the food that will be offered to the guests to the girl's home, again to the accompaniment of great festivities. The women who gather in the girl's home on the henna night have fun for a while, but later try to make her cry by singing sad songs. Henna that has earlier kneaded with water is brought in on a tray surrounded by candles and placed in the middle of the room. The henna is first put on the hands of the bride and then distributed to the guests. Before the henna is applied, coins or gold are also placed at her hands.



Figure 2 - Henna Night

The day after the henna night, there is a ceremony held for receiving the bride. In the early hours of the morning, ceremonies known as the bridegroom shave, preparing the bridegroom and such are held at the man's home. The bride gets ready in her own parent's home. On that day, the guests in the man's home go to the girl's house to receive

the bride. As the bride leaves her father's home, a red belt, also called a belt of perseverance, is tied around her waist by her brother or uncle. After the bride has said farewell to her family, she is taken out of her father's home to the accompaniment of prayers, sometimes to hymns, and sometimes with festivities accompanied by reed and drum. As the bride leaves her home, she does things at home so that her single friends may also marry. These include unraveling an unfinished stocking before she leaves so that her friends can marry one after the other in rapid succession, like the unraveled stocking. As the bride leaves her father's home a mirror is held behind the bride for her to have a bright life. When she passes through the threshold of the man's home, butter, honey and similar things are spread on the threshold and the door jamb to provide a sweet harmony between the bride and the people in her new home.



Figure 3 - The reed and drum players playing celebrating the receiving of the bride

At the night of the wedding, a small feast is given to the remaining few guests in the house of the groom's family, and then a religious ceremony is held to marry the couple, presided over by the imam. After the religious ceremony, the couple enters their room. Meanwhile, a series of religious rites and spells are performed to provide a harmonious relationship between bride and groom. These include thrusting a knife into the door of the room, or opening a lock in front of the door. In addition, the people there are asked not to cross their hands and arms. Food specially prepared earlier for that night by the bride and placed in her trousseau chest, together with a food tray with other meals, are left in the room. In some places, a single spoon, a single fork and a single glass are put on the tray to oblige the bride and groom to share them. It is believed that they will get used to each other much quicker that way.



Figure 4 - The traditional dance of bride and groom at the wedding