

Iranian Marriage Ceremony

Summary

The Iranian wedding ceremony like many other rituals in the country goes back to the ancient Zoroastrian traditions. Currently, there are two stages to a marriage. The first is called *aghd* meaning knot. This involves the legal process; both parties and their guardians sign the marriage document and a financial contract *mahr* (sometimes ceremonial), for the benefit of the bride. The second stage of the marriage, *arousi*, includes the actual feasts and the celebration, bride in Persian is also called *arous*. The ceremony takes place in a specially decorated room with flowers and a beautiful and elaborately decorated spread (*sofreh aghd*) and it traditionally faced the direction of the sunrise and took place before sunset, since light was sacred for the ancient Iranians. This part of the ceremony consists of preliminary blessings, questions to the witnesses, guardians and the marrying couple and finally the ceremony is solemnized by reciting verses from holy books and the signing of the marriage document.

First, the bridegroom is asked if he wishes to enter into the marriage contract. After he says yes, then the bride is asked the same question. However, the bride remains silent. The question is repeated three times then, she says yes. To make the bridegroom wait for the bride's answer is to signify that it is the husband who seeks the wife. During the service female relatives of the couple hold a fine long scarf or other delicate fabrics like silk over the couple's head. Two pieces of crystallized sugar cones are rubbed together, a symbolic act to sweeten the couple's life. Then, two parts of the fabric over the head are symbolically sewn together with needle and thread. The ceremony is suggestive of the ancient Zoroastrian traditions when every person received a ceremonial belt (*koshti*) at age 15. The symbolic act of sewing the bride and groom's *koshti* together is uniting the couple for the rest of their lives. Then the couple receives gifts and when the two leave the room, they are showered with coins, flowers, rice and the sweet candy *noghl*.

The decorated spread contains several items, each symbolising a different aspect of the ancient religion and various deities protecting elements of nature such as plants, earth and water. Currently, mirror and candelabras represent purity, the decorated bread means prosperous feasts and honey and crystallized sugar is to sweeten the couple's life. The incense *esfand* is burnt to keep the evil eye away. Herbs, fruits and cheese symbolize abundance and fertility as is decorated eggs a universal symbol of fertility. Gold coins and a bowl of water containing flowers or orange petals are also present. In the Zoroastrian context, the wedding spread has a very significant message. It meant that marriage is a sacred bound that with help and guidance from the God Ahuramazda (represented by light, i.e. lit candles/mirror) and other deities (represented by greens and water, i.e. Amرداد, Khordad and Esfand) will hopefully lead to a happy (sweets) and prosperous (gold, bread, fruits) life with children (grains, eggs, representing fertility).

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Congratulations to the bride & groom