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Traditions play heavy role internationally

■ Marriage customs differ drastically around the world, but people everywhere view traditions as sacred

By Kara Cogswell
For the Emerald

It is the day of the barat, and a young bride waits anxiously. She has just taken her wedding vows, and although legally married, she has yet to meet her new husband.

When she is finally brought into the banquet room, she is covered with flowers; her face is veiled. The groom enters, his face also mostly hidden by an elaborate head decoration.

They are seated next to each other. The bride lifts the mirror that she is given and turns it toward the face of her new husband. He does the same, and in the reflection, their eyes meet for the first time.

This Pakistani marriage custom may seem unthinkable to most Americans, but in Pakistan and many other Muslim countries, arranged marriages are common.

"In many families, it is forbidden for the bride and groom to meet before the wedding," said Anita Weiss, an international studies professor.

"In an arranged marriage, the match is made by the families of the bride and groom. And if the parents choose wisely, the marriage itself is likely to be successful," Weiss said. "When arranged marriages are done because people want the best possible outcome, they often work well."

Senior Wendy Wong, who is from Hong Kong, said in her country parental approval is important, although parents do not directly choose whom their children marry.

"Before the marriage ceremony, the groom will go to the bride's house, and to be let in, he has to do whatever he is asked," Wong said.

Friends of the bride test the groom by making him perform tasks such as push-ups. When he has sufficiently proved his love, he is allowed into the house.

Once inside, both the bride and the groom

will bow to her parents and serve them tea.

"This symbolizes respect for the older generation," Wong said.

The groom also gives the bride's parents an envelope containing money, known as the bridal price, which the parents later return as a gesture of good fortune.

In many countries, marriage celebrations can last days — or even weeks.

As early as a month before a wedding, families in Pakistan may start celebrating with rituals involving singing and beating drums, Weiss said.

French weddings usually include separate civil and religious ceremonies, said Heidi Chervet, who is French.

Chervet said it is considered an honor to be chosen as a witness for the civil ceremony, which is usually held a few days before the religious ceremony.

"What I think is nice is that you pick two or more people for the civil ceremony, then pick a few more for your church wedding, and that takes care of four or five people you want to honor," Chervet said.

Many Latin American weddings also involve two ceremonies, said junior Chessy Arriaza, who grew up in the Dominican Republic. As in France, the civil ceremony is small and attended by family members only. A few days later there is a much larger religious ceremony.

"Latin weddings are very extravagant, and are intended to show off the family's wealth," Arriaza said.

In nearly every culture, the wedding ceremony includes an element of superstition.

Because in Hong Kong the color red symbolizes happiness and good luck, the bride wears a red dress and carries a red umbrella, Wong said.

Some superstitious traditions seem to defy explanation.

In Swiss weddings, the ring bearer is dressed as a chimney sweep, said Chervet, who has attended a wedding in Switzerland. "It's supposed to be good luck to shake the hand of a chimney sweep. Why, I have no idea."

Flavor, variety take the cake

■ Custom-made wedding cakes can cost thousands of dollars

By Christopher Arnold
For the Emerald

Beverly Starr of Sweet Dreams Designer Cakes stood behind her table at Reed & Cross' recent open house, enticing hundreds of visitors with slices of wedding cake.

Lonnie Tharp, a man touring the wedding gallery, approached the table, examined each flavor and strolled away with a thick slab of banana fudge.

"We have all kinds of flavors," Starr said, "from raspberry swirl to apple spice, German chocolate, almond poppy seed, carrot cake — I could go on and on."

Moments later, Tharp returned to the table. "You can roll around in that cake, it's so good," he told Starr, who has been a full-time cake designer since 1989.

Many people at the open house returned for seconds.

"Any cakes with raspberry are especially popular," Starr said as she arranged more samples on the table.

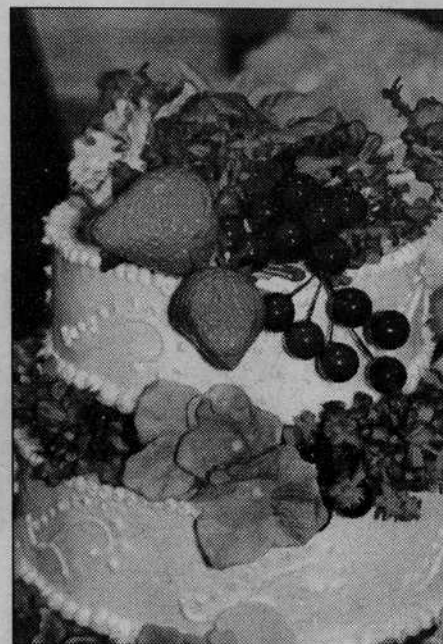
Designing an elaborate wedding cake can take days. Starr's largest, most expensive cake took three days to create. It sold for \$1,500.

"It was probably about six feet tall," she said. "I had to stand on a ladder to reach the top two tiers."

Cakes so enormous are rare, though, according to Nicole Wergeland, co-owner of Inn-Spired Cakes. Wergeland and business partner Melissa Coray have sold gourmet wedding cakes in Eugene for more than a year.

"Our typical wedding cake begins with a three-tiered stack with butter cream frosting," Wergeland said. "Then we embellish the cake with pillars, fresh flowers and designs piped on with frosting."

"Tahitian vanilla with strawberries and whipped cream is one of our most popular cakes," she said.



Laura Smit Emerald

One of the many cakes found at the Emerald City Bridal Show.

An Inn-Spired cake usually costs around \$400, but Wergeland also has experience with more expensive, extravagant designs.

"Depending on the size of the reception, the intricacy of the design and the number of side cakes, you could spend up to \$2,500," she said.

Such an elaborate cake is baked and designed piece by piece, then assembled at the last moment, Wergeland said. The entire project can take four days.

That's a lot of frosting, but Wergeland admits her job isn't always so sweet, especially when it comes to delivery.

"It can get kind of hairy when you're in the back of a van, carting someone's wedding cake up a windy mountain logging road," Wergeland said.