

Tofiq Babayev,  
Doctor of history

# BREAD IS SACRED



**R**espect and love for bread and corn, care for this gift and the call for forgiveness have been very strong in the life of Turkic peoples, including Azerbaijanis. Our great grandfathers and grandmothers always wished all of us moral beauty: If bread dropped on the ground, they picked it up, kissed it and put it on a higher place in order not to lose wealth.

Wise and edifying sayings, as well as proverbs, beliefs, rites and ceremonies related to bread – this ancient gift, which have survived to this day and still live, take a special place among Turkic peoples, including Azerbaijanis, who are part of this family. In our oral folklore, written literature, especially in the world of our classics, there are many edifying and wise sayings related to bread. All



these samples are meaningful, valuable and admonishing pieces that have stood the test of time. With these pieces, our people expressed the historical path they traveled, their spiritual world, faiths and beliefs, family and household issues, ways of thinking and life, economic life and great public issues in a compact, simple, convincing and natural language.

Once the children of our homeland were born, they absorbed the flavor of bread and took shelter in its warmth. When taking the baby out after it got dark, our grandmothers put a slice of bread in his swaddling clothes.

When the baby went to bed, they put bread under his head and cradle so that the baby does not get frightened and sleeps comfortably. The echo of this tradition of ours can be heard in the Avesta: "If there is bread there, evil forces will run away."

The elders of our people and our ancestors have considered corn and bread to be the blessing of our table since ancient times. There was a popular saying that bread came from the Koran. This advice was pronounced by our father Gorgud. On the last Wednesday of the year, they scattered grain all over the house to ensure that the year brings abundance and wealth. According to our grandmothers, it was necessary to bake a gogal on the last Wednesday of the year to get a flavor of wealth from the hearth.

When people started a journey and visited distant lands, they passed under bread. They said that he who passed under bread would return safe and sound from a journey. It appears that this belief forms the basis of the following bayati that is written in our memory:

I have passed through a thousand and one layers,  
I will return safe and sound, mother,  
I have passed under bread.

When home sickness and nostalgia overcame travelers who longed for their homeland and its bread, they kissed the handful of soil and two or three grains they had taken with them as they had no access to their homeland.

In the past, people welcomed foreign rulers, military chiefs or messengers who came to our country with a clear and open heart with bread and salt. They had to take a piece of bread, dip it into the salt and eat it. Thus, that person let it be known that he had set foot in our land with a clear intention.

It is believed that in the past, conquerors and military chiefs who traveled the world, defeated armies and



occupied various countries were not afraid of anything. Regarding themselves as men of power, they trampled upon children and elders and carried on. The only thing they could not trample upon was bread, and they stopped once they saw it and did not dare to tread on it.

When they get up from the table, they say: Let our table always be open, let it always have bread and wealth. We ate our piece of bread, let no one remain without wealth and may God give everyone bread.

Our ancestors said of those who were able to get this gift even at times of hardship – "You make your living when you plant bread" or "A brave man can get his bread even from stone".

Bread and corn are regarded as symbols of wealth, sweet gifts and friendliness for a new family. In connection with wedding ceremonies, our people have a number of beliefs and rites related to bread. Let's pay attention to a number of beliefs we have gathered from the people. I have heard from elders that at the ceremony of getting the bride's consent at the wedding ceremony, there was a tradition of cutting bread. After giving and receiving a promise, three dishes are brought to the table on a big tray (majmayi). One of them contained honey, another – butter and the third one – the flat bread (yukha, lavash or tandir bread) brought by the matchmakers. One of the elders spread the butter and the honey on the bread and gives it to the fathers of the boy and the girl. The boy's father holds the bread and the girl's father cuts it. At this moment, they say: Congratulations, we made a promise as we cut this honestly earned bread. Let them be happy and live a wealthy life.

Ahead of wedding ceremonies in rural areas of Azerbaijan, the families of both the boy and the girl hold yukhaustu ceremonies (this custom is popularly known as atmakyapdi, toyyukhasi, chorakyapdi, jaturustu and





yukhagunu) related to the preparation of various kinds of bread and flat breads for the wedding table. Both houses light their ovens and hearths from the early morning. Young girls who come to help and old women give their blessing and get down to work. In this work, which also involves the engaged girl, the women make dough, cut out paste balls, roll up thin yukha and lavash, bake breads like yayma, gatlama, yukha, tandir, etc. on the saj or inside the tandir, while the young girls help the women who are baking the bread.

Folks, come quickly  
 Wedding bread is being made  
 The bride's bread  
 The groom's bread is being made

According to the popular tradition, women invited to the ceremony cut a piece off the bread and give their blessing by saying – congratulations and may God bring security and wealth to the country. When bread was baked at the house of the engaged girl, the boy's mother comes there with several women and gives those who baked bread a dressing gown called fatirustu, wishing them a hearth full of love, an abundant table and hot bread. The yukha that is baked first at the ceremony is given to poor children and people without families in the village. Some of the first bread is then given to the mothers of the boy and the girl. On the day of the wedding, the bride's mother gave bread to her daughter and said: Always live a wealthy life, my daughter, and may God give you plenty of food.

In the past, mothers who collected dowry for their daughters and clothes for their future daughters-in-law

put a spike in the dowry kept in the chest so that it will be used on a good occasion.

When the daughter or the son married, our ancestors gave them their blessing by wishing them to have plenty of food. The bride took seven types of grain (wheat, barley, grain, corn, rice, vetch and lentil) to her husband's house so that the new family and new house always remain wealthy. Similarly, they put sweet bread, shakarburra and other sweets on the wedding tray, which meant a wish of constant sweetness and love in the house.

According to the tradition of some places, a ceremony to collect bread was held to test the bride. When the bride was taken into the room allocated to her in this connection, bread, yukha in dishes or slices of bread are placed on the table along the way. The bride stops, picks up the pieces of bread from the table one by one, kisses them and puts them in the trough in the boy's hands. Then this bread is distributed among girls of the family there. At this moment, wishes like may God make your table full of food, may God give you plenty of bread, God willing and others can be heard from all sides. It is believed that this ritual is conducted in order to give marriageable girls a chance to become brides as soon as possible. In some cases, this rite is conducted in the bride's room.

There is another bread-related rite conducted at weddings. When the bride sets foot in her husband's house on the day of the wedding, the mother-in-law cuts seven breads called khamrali or dastana over her head to ensure that the hearth of the new family becomes full of wealth. The brides eat this bread and express their wishes. May you be proud, may you be wealthy, bride.



According to the custom left over from our grandmothers and ancestors, when people moved into a new house, they took bread to the hearth of the new house from that of the old house to continue the wealth and plenty of their father's hearth.

Our ancestors compared spiritual purity and nobility with the holiness of bread: If you want to be generous, give everyone bread or an honest man never runs out of bread. When people applauded someone, they said: Be happy, reach for bread, have bread, etc.

About people who protected this irreplaceable gift and valued it, there were sayings: The baker knows the value of bread, give the bread to the baker, bread owes bread.

People measured good things, bad things, treason and bravery with bread: Bread is on your knees, may bread close your eye, he loses the bread, don't eat bread with every person at the table or else you will not be able to forget about the bread.

Bread is regarded as a symbol of friendship, brotherhood and trust: People ate bread with a man, but not with a traitor. Those who do not value bread are traitors. Don't break one's heart and bread, we have eaten bread together, do not betray the bread, salt-bread-salt-bread.

About those who do not value bread, lost its trust and had no determination, they said: he tramples upon bread or the table of those who disrespect bread will see no plenty.

On the last Wednesday of the year, flour sacks are left open. It is believed that wealth is distributed on that night. If the sacks are closed, the house will lose its share of wealth.

On Novruz – on the New Year's Eve, people placed a handful of wheat on the roof of the house. When they do so, they believe that the wealth of the house will increase. Wheat protects the house from all kinds of ghosts for a year.

A piece of bread on the ground should not be trodden on: this is regarded as a big sin and insult.

It is regarded as a big sin to falsely swear by bread. It is disrespectful to touch bread without washing your hands, to place the bread upside down, to eat on foot and hold the bread behind your back. A person holding bread in his hand should not use obscene words.

About those who turned their back on the table where bread was eaten and did not value bread, our ancestors said: You should not look down on wealth and it is not humane to be ungrateful towards bread.

About those who trampled upon the truth and were



ungrateful, our ancestors said: May you come face to face with bread, may bread be haram for you, he who loses bread will not find bread.

About generous, hospitable and open-hearted people, they say: a man of bread or bread makes the name for a man.

Honest bread was a criterion in the life of our grandfathers or grandmothers and a symbol of honesty, purity and humanism. People grew up with honest bread. They always achieved their desires. They said that there is no treason in a place where there is honest bread.

It is known from Kitabi Dada Gorgud, which is an ancient monument of Azerbaijani oral folklore and a mirror of our people's distant past, honor and intellect, that our ancestors valued honest bread and wealth gained with honest work more than anything else. In this regard, we have the proverb – if haram brings one thing, it will take away five of them. They believe that if something comes with deceit, it will be gone soon.

My dear ones, earn your bread honestly otherwise it will not bring you wealth. Value honest bread more than anything else. Do not bring dishonesty to your home. People's eyes are strict and people's censure is hard so do not bring it upon yourselves. They used to say: The people's mouth is a sack's mouth. Think, speak and work honestly. Honesty has never left anyone in a difficult situation. The people remember those who live honestly.

Thus, wise and edifying philosophical and moral sayings, proverbs, rites and ceremonies related to corn and bread, which are one of the most valuable pearls of our rich folklore, are unwritten rules that regulate the life, activities and behavior of Azerbaijanis. They all take an important place in the beliefs and faiths of Azerbaijanis and at the same time, all other Turkic peoples and have reached the present day. ✨