

# Taarof

**Taarof** or **Ta'arof** (Persian: تعارف) is a Persian word (also verb: تعارف کردن) which refers to an Iranian form of civility emphasizing both deference and social rank. It encompasses a range of social behaviors; one example of taarof could be described as posing false invitations and promising future services or deeds to primarily strangers or distant relatives and expecting them not to take the offer and keep declining it. Taarof more often works in a totally opposite way. For example, an absolutely desired object/person/offer may seemingly be refused while deep inside is demanded and wished. For instance, young Persian ladies may never express their passion to a potential lover based on shyness and social norms; while, they expect the person of interest remain consistent in expressing love and posing. This also applies to objects, specially food, which are offered to individuals as a favor or even a donation, and Taarof dictates individuals to refuse the favors/donations no matter how badly are needed. The refusing individual expects the object (or the favor) to be left for his/her benefit instead of directly receiving it. However, the closer two people get in a relationship, the less taarof appears in their behavior towards one another

The prevalence of taarof often gives rise to distinctly Iranian styles of negotiation.<sup>[1]</sup> For example, a worker negotiating a salary might begin with aeulogy of the employer, followed by a lengthy bargaining session consisting entirely of indirect, polite language – both parties are expected to understand the *implied* topic of discussion. Likewise, a shopkeeper may initially refuse to quote a price for an item, *suggesting* that it is worthless ("ghaabel nadaareh"). Taarof obliges the customer to insist on paying, possibly several times (three times), before a shopkeeper finally quotes a price and real negotiation can begin.

Taarof also governs the rules of hospitality: a host is obliged to offer anything a guest might want, and a guest is equally obliged to refuse it. This ritual may repeat itself several times (three times) before the host and guest finally determine whether the host's offer and the guest's refusal are areal or simply polite.

Taarof plays a large role in the etiquette of food. If you go to any meal, are invited to any house for food, then you will be expected to eat seconds and thirds. You must eat to please the host but at the same time taarof demands that you can't just go ahead and dig into the food once you are done with your first round. Good manners dictates that you have to pretend you are full, the food was excellent and that it would be impossible to fit anything else in. Your host will then demand you do not do tarof ("ta'rof nakon") – you say 'no' 2 or 3 times and then you pretend you have caved into their insistence and pile on the food. If you do it any other way, you can come across as either starving or simply a bit uncouth.<sup>[2]</sup>

It is possible to ask someone not to taarof ("taarof nakonid"), but that raises new difficulties, since the request itself might be a devious type of taarof!<sup>[3]</sup>

At times, taarof can lead to one performing a task that one does not want to perform. For instance, if one friend offers a ride to another friend only because they are being polite, they may become stuck in the situation if the friend agrees to get the ride. Of course if one was going by the rules of taarof, one would refuse the offer many times before accepting.

It is a way of denying one's will to please your counterpart, although sometimes the will is only denied because of the custom and not just to please the counterpart. But there are situations where taarof persist upon a request to make the counterpart genuinely satisfied. Taarof may cause misunderstandings between both parties and can be a source for awkward situations in a social setting.

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# History

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Some political theorists have argued that during the period of serfdom, taarof regulated diplomatic discourse at princely courts. It involved a sharp curbing of one's comportment, speech, and action to make people, honour, and prestige calculable as instruments for political advancement.

According to D. M. Rejali, for the feudal elite the ornamentation of speech symbolises prestige. With the advent of capitalism and its scientific paradigm, communication became more precise and the formality of taarof a hindrance in the pursuit for rapid capital accumulation.<sup>[4]</sup>

# In the West

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The closest one can come to taarof in the Western culture is the question of "Who's paying the restaurant bill?" This is an awkward situation where everybody in the company is reaching for their wallets and it's usually resolved by social status: the one with the highest income, the most legitimate reason, or most power pays. But still, everyone insists on paying. In Southern Italy a custom similar to taarof exists (*fare i complimenti*), and is part of table manners.

For an extensive treatment of tarof vocabulary and language strategies see Beeman. William O., *Language, Status and Power in Iran*<sup>[5]</sup>

# See also

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- Qahr and Ashti

# References

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1. "In the Persian world of 'ta'arof,' they make offers that will be refused"(http://www.latimes.com/local/great-reads/lam-e-c1-tarof-20150706-story.html). *LA Times*. 2015-07-06. Retrieved 2015-11-30.
2. Ta'rof - Understanding Iranian Culture(https://commisceo-global.com/blog/ta-rof-understanding-iranian-culture)
3. "The Persian art of declining what you really want and offering what you'll never give could play a role in US-Iran nuclear talks"(http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-11-05/persian-art-declining-what-you-really-want-and-offering-what-you-ull-never-give). *Public Radio International (PRI)* 2014-11-05. Retrieved 2015-11-30.
4. D M Rejali, "Torture & Modernity: Self, Society, and the State in Modern Iran". An exception would be the Japanese Tea Ceremony, which seems to have adapted well to modern requirements (see MT issue no 1).
5. Beeman, William O. (1986).*Language, Status and Power in Iran*(http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/product\_infophp?products\_id=19702) Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press ISBN 978-0-253-33139-7.

# Further reading

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- D M Rejali, *Torture & Modernity*
- Umberto Eco, *Political Language: The Use and Abuse of Rhetoric*

# External links

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- *The New York Times*, *Iranian 101: A Lesson for Americans; The Fine Art of Hiding What You Mean to Say*, by Michael Slackman
- *The Atlantic*, *Talk Like an Iranian*, by Christopher de Bellaigue, 25 August 2012
- *This American Life*: *Oh, You Shouldn't Have- Act Three*, 31 March 2011

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# تعارف

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## Arabic

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### Etymology 1

From the root **ع ر ف** (*ʿ-r-f*); compare **عَرَفَ** (*ʿarafa*, “to know”).

### Verb

**تَعَارَفَ** • (taʿārafa) *VI, non-past* **يَتَعَارَفُ** (yataʿārafu)

- to get to know one another, become acquainted with one another
- to become acquainted (**بِ** (*bi*) *with*)

### Conjugation

Conjugation of **تَعَارَفَ** (form-VI sound)

### References

- Mace, John (2007), “تعارف”, in *Arabic Verbs*, New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., → ISBN

### Etymology 2

### Noun

تَعَارُف • (ta'āraf) *m*

1. verbal noun of تَعَارَف (ta'ārafa) (*form VI*)

## Declension

Declension of noun تَعَارُف (ta'āraf)

## Persian

### Etymology

From Arabic تَعَارُف (ta'āraf), verbal noun of تَعَارَف (ta'ārafa, “to become known or introduced to each other; etc”).

### Pronunciation

- IPA<sup>(key)</sup>: /tʰæ(ʔ)ɒ:ˈɾɒf/
- (Tehrani) IPA<sup>(key)</sup>: [tʰɒ:ˈɾɒf]

### Noun

تعارف • (ta'ārof)

1. ta'arof/taarof; the intricate Persian system of etiquette and good manners, emphasizing extreme deference, humility and respect.

### Derived terms

- تعارف کردن (ta'ārof kardan)
- تعارف زدن (ta'ārof zadan)
- تعارفی (ta'ārofi)
- بی‌تعارف (bi-ta'ārof, “frank; frankly”)
- تعارف اومد نیومد داره (ta'ārof umad nayumad dâre)
- تعارف تیکه پاره کردن (ta'ārof tikke pâre kardan)

### See also

- قابل ندارد (qâbel nadârad)
- قدمت روی چشم (qadamat ru-ye čašm)
- قربانت بروم (qorbânat beravam)
- چشمت روشن (čašmat rowšan)
- خواهش می‌کنم (xâheš mi-konam)
- تعارف نکنید (ta'ārof nakonid)

### Further reading

- Taarof

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