**What are rituals and beliefs that are a part of your culture or background? How can an outsider understand these?**

Dagestani culture is rich and diverse, shaped by the region's unique geography, history, and multi-ethnic composition. I’ll try to mention main beliefs and rituals we practice and how an outsider can understand or participate in these.

As I’ve mentioned many times elders are held in high regard, and their opinions often guide family and community decisions. So, it is customary to greet elders first and show them deference in social situations. We not only greet them first, one has to get up from their seat to greet elders, if it is your close relative you usually hug them too, at least side hug.

Our people like to hug each other a lot, that leads me to the next ritual of simply put hospitality (or qonaqchilik) which is a cornerstone of Dagestani culture. Guests are treated with great honor, often you hug them to when they enter, and meals are a central part of hosting. Refusing food or drink can be seen as disrespectful. Friendship ties are strong, but family ties are stronger, and extended families often live close together or even in the same household.

Community life is vibrant, with weddings, religious gatherings, and other celebrations bringing people together. Dagestani weddings are elaborate, with distinct rituals like the bride's departure from her family home when adults through candies for kids and give money for bride’s relatives, and traditional dances. The event often reflects a blend of Islamic traditions and local customs.

Dagestan is predominantly Muslim, and Islamic rituals like daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and celebrating Eid are central to life. During Eid everybody visits everybody, it is usually celebrated for 3 days as you need to meet guests, visit your relatives, neighbors and friends.

A few other examples are our main dance lezginka, dynamic and expressive and common between all ethnos, is performed during celebrations and is a cultural symbol of pride and identity.

Honor and reputation (referred to as namus) play a crucial role in daily life and influence behavior, especially regarding women’s modesty and family integrity, but not only; often older people ask kids “where is your namus?” to make them behave well.

Now, how to learn and to be a part of this rich and diverse culture? First and foremost, I’d recommend to respect Islamic customs, such as dress codes, dietary restrictions (e.g., halal food), and religious holidays as this is the most important part of our life. Then, read about Dagestan’s history and diverse ethnic groups (e.g., Avars, Lezgins, Dargins) or maybe watch documentaries or attend cultural events to understand the nuances of life in Dagestan. When attending a Dagestani celebration or visiting a home, participate actively but humbly in the rituals.

Moreover, ask questions about traditions, as many Dagestanis enjoy sharing their heritage, so showing interest is already enough for people to be invested in your learning process. Just don’t forget to use formal greetings and titles, especially with elders, avoid overly casual behavior in traditional or religious settings.

Lastly, just be open-minded and adaptable, recognize that customs can vary widely within Dagestan’s many ethnic groups, try on the role of anthropologist and approach the culture with curiosity and avoid making assumptions based on limited exposure.