

The Bakhtiari Alphabet

This documentary takes us to the pastoral lands of the Bakhtiari tribe of Iran. In a world where misunderstanding of people is rampant, there is a research team that has worked feverishly over seven years to bring us on a journey. This journey serves no political agenda, except to provide “education for all.” While the nomadic tribe hosts this visit, it is clear that trust and good will permeates the relationships between the members of the tribe and their guests, the research team.

A subtle but important feature of the film is its pace. Slowly and gently, we hear a heartbeat, watch the horizon appear through a mist and then ... we see color! The color of the landscape is only enriched by the festive colors worn by the women of the tribe. The women create homes, consistency and stability on a relatively unpredictable difficult migration twice a year. The women are the guardians of the wisdom of the tribe. They are strong, impressive and they welcome their guests with grace. There is an “old knowing soul” impression about them. They trudge through the verdant landscape, as sure footed as their mountain goats.

It is a sight to see.

The research team had a specific purpose for observing the Bakhtiari tribe. First, the goal is to preserve the ancient culture of the tribe thereby also preserving the national culture. Second, the objective is to evaluate and improve the educational system for the children of the tribe. Third, the team identifies problems, recognizes strengths and weaknesses and offers concrete solutions to enhance a life style worth persevering.

The team outlines very clearly what is happening within the tribe with no sugar coating. Life is hard. The tribal people want their children to be educated however; they see no connection between what their children are being learning and how it applies to their lives. The research team not only respects this straight forward commentary, but makes special effort to integrate the nomadic tradition and modern teaching technology to enhance the lives of tribal people. They do not wish to destroy their way of life in favor of “progress” but they engage in a process of improving practical educational systems to add to the culture rather than eliminate traditions, mythology and mysticism. They embrace the ancient wisdom and recognize its value.

Aside from the beauty of the country, the beauty of the people emerges in a way that invites one to look deeper, understand more fully the grace of ancient tradition. It is a truthful description of a people who choose to live this age-old life style, asking for nothing from anyone but their own people. They care for one another and their God.

In a world where we sometimes experience fear of “the other,” this film shares a different perspective that we need to see. Peace in the world can come through education, understanding and respecting one another. This film helps us take a step toward that end. Watch, learn and enjoy.

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