

HOST EDITION

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COURSE

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# INTRODUCTION

The time is nearing for you to host a Supra. Such an exciting event to look forward to! The Supra is an ancient Georgian toasting feast that has persisted through time up to the present.

In this crash course, you'll learn all about how a Supra works and how to host one. This guide will help you prepare, but don't worry, once the table is set and the guests arrive there is only one person that can mess up a Supra: the Tamada.

But first, we must offer you a toast, to you, the host of the Supra!

*To you, the host:*

*In Georgian culture, those who serve receive great praise. The Tamada is praised for facilitating toasts, and the Merikipe is thanked for pouring wine, but the greatest servant of all is no doubt the host.*

*As the host, you offer the gift of hospitality, and if we can see the relationship between hospitality and hospital, we begin to understand the seriousness of the virtue. The host offers a space where guests can find health, both physical and spiritual. The food that the host provides and arranges nourishes the bodies of all at the table. The host's generosity and compassion uplift the souls of those humble enough to receive.*

*The host is at once the most hidden and unsung participant of the Supra, and the cornerstone supporting the entire celebration. When the host offers up earthly things – a space, a table, food and guest invitations – the Tamada receives them and transforms them into a beautiful whole through meaningful toasts.*

*To you, the host!*

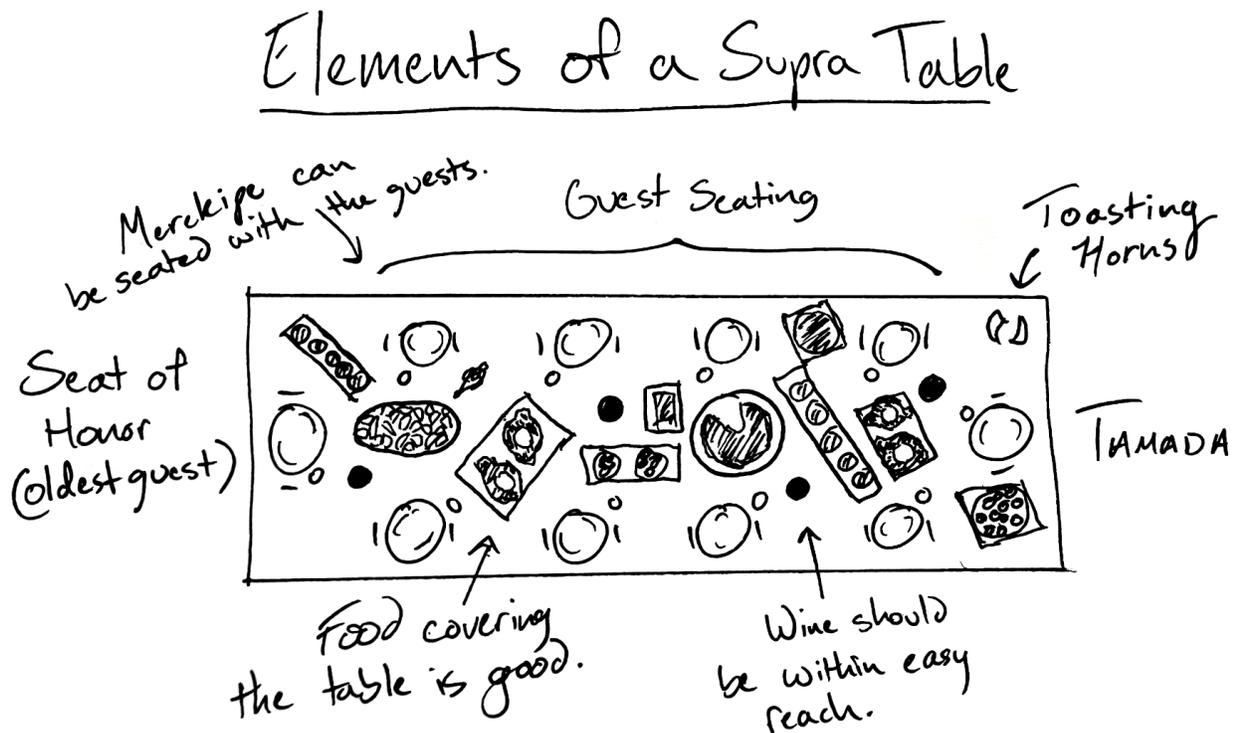
*Gagimarjos!*



# HOSTING

## How should I arrange the table and guests?

A Supra typically takes place at a rectangular table, with the Tamada, or toastmaster, at the head. The single rectangular table (or tables joined together) gives the Supra a natural cohesion and hierarchy. Understandably, this arrangement is not always possible. You may set up two rectangular tables parallel to each other, or three if necessary. Be sure to avoid round tables.



## How many people should I invite?

The number of people at a Supra can vary from two to two hundred. We recommend at least ten. More than forty can get unwieldy, but it's possible.

## What food should I serve?

The important thing is for there to be more than enough food! Serve anything you'd like to

serve. We have seen Supras with only traditional Georgian food and others with no Georgian food at all. Often a Supra will be potluck and guests will bring what they please. If you wish to do one Georgian dish, the cheese bread (khachapuri) is a must.

### **How should I serve the food?**

Food at a Supra should be placed on the table family-style. You can decide whether you'd like to place it all on the table before the Supra begins, or if you'd like to bring things out in courses. Both ways are very acceptable. The thing you want to avoid is buffet-style, as it will cause too much movement during the Supra, with participants getting up and sitting down. The goal is to create a space where everyone can focus on the toasts and one another's company.

### **What will the Tamada do?**

The Tamada is the master of ceremonies. He will get all the guests involved and make sure the table is moving along. Once he arrives he will take care of entertaining the guests. The host is finished at that point, except for the serving of food.

### **How long does a Supra last?**

Some Supras can last a *long* time. But a good table doesn't have to be a marathon. Six toasts is probably too short, and a Supra that gets to sixteen is often more than four hours long. Each table is different, but you can plan on between three and five hours.

### **What are the drinking rules? Does everyone have to drink?**

A *real* Supra is a wine-only table. Again, this is the Georgian rule. We aren't Georgians, so if we want to bend that rule we can. But for Georgians wine is blood. No wine, no blood, no life, dead table. Still, this is negotiable for us. As for consuming liquor, a Supra is not designed to get people drunk. It is designed for fellowship. Because there are numerous toasts people can and do get drunk, but no one is ever forced to drink. The Tamada will direct the drinking and encourage people to participate, but this is not a fraternity party. The Supra is more like a poetry contest, and it should be treated with the same kind of honor and respect.



### **What should guests wear?**

In Georgia, the formality of the Supra depends on the significance of the event: for Supras following weddings, baptisms and funerals, the dress code will be quite formal. Remember,

at a Supra all things are elevated: food is delectable and words are eloquent. The way one dresses, too, should be considered. At the very least, avoid wearing a bathing suit or athletic wear. But don't worry about going black tie, either (unless you want!).

### **What if guests arrive late?**

Not the end of the world! Georgians are notoriously some of the latest people in the world. It's best to arrive before the Supra begins, but life happens. Latecomers should be prepared to receive the classic toast to latecomers, a toast you'll hear at nearly every Supra.

# USEFUL VOCABULARY

During the Supra you'll learn some Georgian words that are part and parcel of the event. The Tamada will explain some of the vocabulary, but you can get a headstart with some basic words below:

<b>Supra</b> სუფრა	A formal toasting feast from the Republic of Georgia. At a Supra you will encounter bountiful food, wine, music, poetry, and a series of participatory toasts led by a Tamada. The tradition dates back millennia and is still common today, to celebrate anything from weddings to funerals to religious holidays. Supra literally means “tablecloth”.
<b>Keipi</b> ქეიპი	A party. In America, we use the term to refer to a casual Supra. In Georgia, it's common to see three men sitting around a bottle of <i>cha cha</i> , making very short, informal toasts. This is a Keipi. Pronounced “kay-pee.” Keipi is also the name of an <a href="#">incredible Georgian restaurant</a> in Greenville, SC.
<b>Tamada</b> თამადა	The toastmaster who leads the table on a journey, exploring life's deepest themes while giving everyone a sense of belonging. A Tamada is an orator, leader, jester, poet, listener and confidant. Pronounced with stress on the first syllable.
<b>Merikipe</b> მერიქიფე	The Tamada's helper and wine pourer. In Georgia, the Merikipe role is highly honored. Etymologically, “mere” means afterwards and “keipi” means party, implying that the Merikipe's time to feast is later on, presumably as a reward in the afterlife.
<b>Sadghegrdzelo</b> სადგეგრძელო	A toast made by anyone at the table. When somebody wants to make a toast, they say, “Tamada, may I have a <i>sadghegrdzelo</i> ?” The etymological meaning of “sadghegrdzelo” is something akin to an appeal for longevity, as each toast causes the night to prolong. You can pronounce it “sagradzelo.”
<b>Alaverdi</b> ალავერდი	A special toast wherein the Tamada asks a particular participant to offer a toast. In Georgia, Tamadas will often name the theme to toast to. In America, Tamadas often ask the participant to set the new theme with his/her toast, thereby passing the “Tamada-ship” for one round of

toasting. “Alaverdi” is also the name of a famous monastery in the wine region of Georgia. The word is likely Turkish in origin, meaning God “Allah” gave “verdi”.

**Gagimarjos**  
გაგიმარჯოს

Literally, “May you be victorious.” Exclaimed by all participants after each toast. In Georgia, you will hear **gaumarjos**, meaning “Victory to it,” and **gagvimarjos**, meaning “May we be victorious.” **Shen gagimarjos** may be said to a person who finishes a particularly magnificent or meaningful toast.

**Vakhtanguri**  
ვახტანგური

A toast named after the legendary [King Vakhtang](#), wherein two people link their right arms and drink from **khantsebi**, or ram’s horns. Receiving a Vakhtanguri is a great honor, celebrating heroism and establishing a deep bond of kinship.

**Ghvino**  
ღვინო

Wine, symbolizing the blood shared by all participants. Georgians claim, and archeologists affirm, that viniculture originated in the Georgian lands 8,000 years ago, and is therefore taken very seriously.

**Bolomde**  
ბოლომდე

Bottom’s up. To finish one’s glass as a sign of respect, often done after the fifth toast to the departed. “Bolo” means end and “mde” means until.

**Cha cha**  
ჭაჭა

The common Georgian hard alcohol, made from distilled solids leftover from wine production.

**Qvevri**  
ქვევრი

A large ceramic egg-shaped vessel which is traditionally used for wine fermentation. Crushed grapes are placed in a qvevri (sometimes 8 feet tall) and then buried underground.

**Madloba**  
მადლობა

Thank you

**Gamarjoba**  
გამარჯობა

Hello

**Nakhvamdis**  
ნახვამდის

Goodbye

# THE TOASTS

## What is a toast?

A toast sits somewhere between a declaration and a prayer. It is a speech that both unites and uplifts everyone gathered. The best toasts are made to themes relatable to all and can be endlessly explored. The action of a toast is to *celebrate*, never to disparage or cause division.

## How does toasting work at a Supra?

Like a Christmas tree, the Tamada offers a theme, or a universal pattern, and participants then decorate the tree with instances and particularities of the pattern. A Supra may be likened to a friendly poetry contest, with participants “one-upping” the Tamada and each other with more elegant and heartfelt toasts.

A toast may vary in length, anywhere from a few words to a minutes-long story. The total number of toasting themes will depend on the table, but generally there will be at least seven and up to twenty-five, give or take. Five toasts is the bare minimum: without five toasts there is no Supra.



## Step by step:

**Step 1: Tamada toasts.** When the Tamada stands and clinks a wine glass, participants should give the Tamada their full attention. The Tamada announces a new toasting theme and delivers a toast, after which everyone exclaims “gagimarjos!”

**Step 2: Participants toast on the theme.** After the Tamada’s toast, the table may go back to conversation. At any point, any participant (including you!) may ask the Tamada for a *sadghegrdzelo*. It’s important that participants toast to the theme presented by the Tamada. For example, if the Tamada toasts to friendship, it’s best not to toast to competition, unless of course you can tie competition into friendship. (Poetry at work!)

**Step 3: Tamada moves to a new theme.** After some time, the Tamada will clink a glass and move on to a new toasting theme.

**Example of a toasting round:**

**Tamada:** *“I’ll now make a toast to parents. Perhaps some of you can relate to me, when I say I didn’t have gratitude for my parents until I had my first child. We’ve all been hurt by our parents in one way or another, sure, some of us worse than others. But let’s remember the love our parents had and have for us, the parts of them that wanted nothing but the best for us. Without our parents we would be nothing, so thank God for the people who raised us. Gagimarjos!”*

**Participant 1:** *“Tamada, may I give a sadghegrdzelo on the theme of parents?”*

**Tamada:** *“Caroline, yes, please give a sadghegrdzelo.”*

**Participant 1:** *“I want to toast to my father, who coached me in basketball for many years of my childhood. I thought he was hard on me from time to time, but looking back, I’m really thankful for the competitive spirit and appreciation for camaraderie he gave to me. To my father, Tom, gagimarjos!”*

**Participant 2:** *“Tamada, I also have a toast to parents...”*

**Good vs. bad toasts:**

A good toast is generally vulnerable but not overly sentimental, elegant but not flowery, not overlong but not terse, respectful but not stiff, funny but not irreverent. Here are a few examples of good toasts and bad toasts:

Bad Toasts	Good Toasts
<b>On the theme of women</b>	
<p><i>“To our wives and girlfriends... may they never meet.”</i></p> <p><b>Why?</b></p> <p>It’s best to avoid “pirate toasts” – cliché toasts that you can find in a quick Google search. There is little depth or vulnerability</p>	<p><i>“Ted, this is a toast to your mom, on your birthday. No, I’m serious, we should toast to Viktoria. To all mothers: to the pain of labor that women undergo which men will never understand, because without that pain there’s not a single person at this table who would be here. To Viktoria, and to mothers! Gagimarjos!”</i></p>

or even truth in these toasts. At best they're poor attempts, at worst they make a mockery of the sacred act of toasting.

This toast might (it really shouldn't) pass for a humor-themed toast, but if the theme is to women, a toast like this does anything but celebrate women. Themes are meant to honor, not to mock.

**Why?**

If there's a common thread between all good toasting themes, it's gratitude for a thing, and honor given to its source.

The goal of participants is to take the theme presented by the Tamada and recognize the theme's relevance to oneself and others around the table. A toast on the theme of women which honors both Ted and his mother is an excellent move.

**On the theme of authority**

*"Screw the government, screw taxes, vote Trump 2024!"*

**Why?**

Political discourse, activism and advocacy have no place at the Supra. Everyone at the table will hold their own opinions on things, and there will be times when dialogue between differing opinions takes place. But intentional provocation and agenda-pushing is unacceptable.

*"Tamada, you proposed a toast to authority, so I'd like to make a toast to my grandfather. He passed away two years ago, may his memory be eternal. I remember Grandpa telling me from time to time, "Respect your parents, one day you might be one!" His words taught me that trust and forgiveness are the best ways of honoring authority. But his kindness towards me taught me more about authority than any of his words. To my grandfather. Gagimarjos!"*

**Why?**

When the Tamada proposes a toast, the theme is not yet fully developed. It hasn't been pondered by people at the table, expounded upon or fleshed out. By toasting on the theme, participants round out the meaning of the theme.

A toast like the one above offers an example to make sense of authority, and it may inspire someone else to toast to their grandfather or someone who inspired them in a similar way. By the end of the round, everyone at the table has a fuller appreciation for the theme, and a deeper understanding of the people around them.

**On the theme of the unexpected**

*“One time I came home and couldn’t find my dog. My place isn’t that big so I started freaking out and calling his name. I heard him crawling out from under my low-lying bed frame. My cat little Rascal had been sick and was throwing up a lot. Buddy went under the bed to eat my cat’s vomit. Totally gross. It took a lot of effort for him to crawl under and crawl back out again. Gagimarjos!”*

### **Why?**

Aside from the toast being disgusting and inappropriate for a dining event, it fails to fully connect to the theme of the *unexpected*. Anecdotes are fine as long as they add to the theme in a meaningful way.

*“Here’s a toast to the unexpected. It’s a short story that comes from China. There was a Chinese horse rancher who had seven beautiful horses. One day his finest horse ran away and all the man’s friends came to him to lament and console him. “What sadness! What tragedy!” they all said. “Maybe,” he replied. A week later, the horse returned, and with it came running seven more brilliant, wild horses. The villagers came to the man, “This is the best day of your life, what a blessing!” “Maybe,” the man replied. A week later, the man’s son was riding one of the wild horses only to fall off and break his leg. “What sadness! What tragedy!” his friends cried. “Maybe,” the man replied. A week later, the army conscription officer came to haul off all young men to war. The man’s son, being stuck in bed with a broken leg, could not of course join the war. “This is the best day of your life, what a blessing!” “Maybe,” the man replied. To the unexpected. Gagimarjos!”*

### **Why?**

A short story or parable that contains much meaning makes for an excellent toast. If a story or parable can be tied into the theme, voilà! Pure gold.

## **Common toasting themes:**

- God
- The Mother of God
- Gratitude
- Peace
- Women
- Men
- Elders/parents
- The reason for the gathering
- Family
- Home
- Georgia

- Service
- New life, children, innocence
- Those who couldn’t make it
- Music
- Art
- Adventure
- Struggle
- Suffering
- Humor
- Missed connections
- The Merikipe

- Tradition
- Love
- Beauty
- Hope
- Friendship
- The departed

- The romantic chase
- Nation
- Libation
- The hands that prepared everything
- The Tamada (often the last toast, proposed by the participants)

# WANT HELP CREATING A SUPRA?

**Supra Dinner Society is here for you.** We are a non-profit organization that sends Tamadas all over the United States to facilitate unforgettable Supra dinners.

How we help you host a Supra:

Step 1: Choose your occasion for a Supra. From casual friend gatherings to fancy rehearsal dinners, all kinds of events work great with a Supra.

Step 2: Reach out to us for a conversation, and we'll customize your Supra experience, together. Whether you need a venue, food, wine, or just a Tamada (toastmaster), we'll help plan the special day.

Step 3: Send out your unique invites -along with a helpful introduction to the Supra- to your guests.

Step 4: Gather together for the feast. Our Tamada will facilitate the toasting experience that will evoke all of life's meaningful moments.

Step 5: Reminisce about your Supra dinner for months after the event, cherishing your new memories and heightened friendships!

Whether you want help hosting a Supra, or if you are interested in becoming a Tamada with Supra Dinner Society, don't hesitate to reach out! And learn more at [SupraDinner.com](http://SupraDinner.com).

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