



## Yalda- The Other Winter Holiday

We've all heard of Christmas, Hanukah and New Year's Eve, but there is another winter holiday that is older than all of these. SHAB-E YALDA is the WINTER SOLSTICE and longest night of the year. This corresponds to the night of December 20<sup>th</sup> or 21st in the GREGORIAN calendar you use, and to the night between the last day of the ninth month (Azar) and the first day of the tenth month (Dey) of the Iranian solar calendar. Much like New Year's Eve in many parts of the world, this is the night when Iranians stay up late with family and friends. Yalda is observed in Iran, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and anywhere Iranians live in the world.

### Spell Winter

Spell Yalda or What holiday are we talking about today?

What is the longest night of the year? Winter Solstice, Dec 20/21

What do we call the calendar used in western countries? Gregorian

Name two countries that celebrate Yalda. Iran, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Canada, US, Australia

Where are most of these countries located? Central Asia

What holiday is this similar to in your country? New Year's Eve

Do you get to stay up until midnight on New Year's Eve?

**VAKTivity-** The Persian language, or Farsi, is written right to left using a modified Arabic alphabet. Most vowels are pronounced, but not written, and the letters of a word are mostly joined together. Try tracing the words Shab and Yalda with your finger or pencil-

The first word on the right is *shab* (night) with a short *a* like "at". The 3 swoops with 3 dots is the *sh* and the big swoop with a dot underneath is the *b*. The *a* sound doesn't get its own letter!

The second word is *yalda* (which means birth.) The first *a* is like "at" and the second *a* is like "ah". The first letter has 2 dots underneath- that's *y* or *i*, poor *a* still doesn't get a letter, the tall letter is *l*, the next is *d*, then the *ah* stands alone.

### Question Type Key

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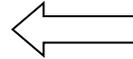


يلدا

شب

A D L (A) Y (E- of)

B (A) SH



Yalda has been celebrated for at least 4,000 years, although some sources say longer. The holiday stems from the ancient Iranian religion of ZOROASTRIANISM. In Zoroastrian tradition, the longest and darkest night of the year was a particularly INAUSPICIOUS (unfavorable or unlucky) day. The CUSTOMS of the night were intended to protect people from evil during that long night, at which time evil forces were imagined to be at their peak. People were advised to stay awake most of the night, and gather in the safety of groups of friends and relatives. Because days will slowly start to become longer after Yalda, it's a celebration of the birth of the sun as a symbol of light conquering darkness, and good conquering evil. Although the religious significance of the long dark night has been lost, the tradition of staying up late with friends and family has remained in Iranian culture to the present day.

Spell Custom

How long has Yalda been celebrated? 4000 years

What's another word for unlucky or unfavorable? Inauspicious

What's the ancient religion of Iran? Zoroastrianism

Do you know the most common religion of Iran nowadays? Islam, Shia Islam

Why did people gather and stay awake on Yalda? Protection from evil, safety

True or false- the days after winter solstice are gradually getting longer, or more sun. True

Food plays a central role in the present-day celebrations. In most parts of Iran, the extended family comes together for a big dinner, usually at the home of the grandparents or older family members. After dinner, a wide variety of fruits are served, such as watermelon, POMEGRANATE, PERSIMMONS, nuts, and dried fruit. And of course, many cups of tea to keep you up all night! It is believed that consuming watermelons on the night of Yalda will ensure

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health and well-being during the coming months. These food items, poetry books, and candles are commonly placed on a KORSI, a short wooden table with a small charcoal fire (or electric heater) underneath. It's covered with quilts and blankets. You sit around the table, pulling the blanket up over you and stretching your legs out under it. If you don't have a korsi, you can just use your coffee table.

Name two of the foods eaten on Yalda. Watermelon, pomegranate, persimmon, nuts, dried fruit, tea

Do you like any of those foods?

What's your favorite fruit?

What's the korsi? Or What do you call the short table with a heater or fire underneath?

Does that sound cozy or dangerous to you?

How do you think Yalda celebrations might be different from usual in 2020?



Other common activities on Yalda night include staying up past midnight, chatting, drinking tea, reading poems out loud, and telling stories. Iranians are really in to old poems. It's tradition to seek DIVINATION (prediction, insight) from the great master poet HAFEZ on Yalda night. You close your eyes, ask a question, open the *Divan-e Hafez* at random, then read and interpret the poem. It is believed that one should not divine by the *Divan-e Hafez* more than three times, however, or the poet may get angry.

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Besides eating, what else is done on Yalda? Staying up late, chatting, drinking tea, reading poems, stories

Do you like any of those activities?

Who would be the best story teller in your family?

What's a word for prediction or insight? Divination

Who do Iranians ask for predictions? The poet Hafez

What happens if you ask for more than three predictions? He gets angry

Do you believe in divination?

Do you want to try it, or at least hear a poem by Hafez?

If you don't have a copy of Hafez poetry at home, no worries- ask your question, and then click on the link below for a random Hafez poem!

First, think or spell your question-

Now click on this site and have someone read the poem.

<https://www.karoon.com/fal-e-hafez>

What do you think of the poem?

What do you think it means for you?

**Shab-e yalda mobarak! (Have a blessed Yalda night!)**

**VAKTivity - Food!**

For the adventurous eaters, here are a few pomegranate dishes to try-

Fesenjun, a stew with walnuts, chicken and pomegranate-

<http://www.mypersiankitchen.com/khoresht-fesenjan-persian-pomegranate-and-walnut-stew/>

Pomegranate soup, which can be made vegetarian or with tiny meatballs-

<http://www.mypersiankitchen.com/vegetarianvegangluten-free-pomegranate-soup/>

And of course, pomegranate jello is super easy and tasty-

<http://www.mypersiankitchen.com/pomegranate-jello/>

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Would you want to try any of those?

### VAKTivity - Music!

Persian classical music is frequently the poems of Hafez and Rumi, famous Iranian poets who lived in the 1200-1300s, alternating with instruments such as drums and stringed instruments. Try listening to some of these songs while eating your fruits!

Mahan Farzad singing a Hafez poem-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvznr7IAPCQ>

Shahram Nazeri singing Rumi poems-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yNScNDqXTg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jy5n5hVYoWM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcXV4brcEaE>

### Sources

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yald%C4%81\\_Night](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yald%C4%81_Night)

<https://www.mypersiancorner.com>

<http://www.mypersiankitchen.com>

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