



Islamic Republic of Iran
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MFA DIGEST

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Yalda: Celebration of Winter Solstice

Traditions and rituals of Iranians on the night of Yalda



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ORIGINS: WHERE DOES YALDA COME FROM?



Celebrate the longest night of the year

Yaldā is an ancient celebration whereby the brilliance of the sun along with the warmth of life are cherished. This event coincides with an increase in day-length in the region. The winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere corresponds to Dey 1st (December 22nd) in the Iranian calendar.

All people from Iran celebrate this ritual festivity. However, those Iranians who, due to a variety of reasons have to live far away from their homelands, also uphold “Yaldā/Chelle” based on their homeland calendars, exactly as it is practiced by their own family members and indigenous individuals back home.

End of the Dark Night

In public belief, the night of the last day of the Persian calendar month of Azar – this year it falls on December 21st - harbors the eventual victory of light over darkness. After Yaldā, the days will grow longer and the nights will fall shorter. As per tradition, Iranian families get together in the houses of their elderly relatives, most often grandfathers and grandmothers, and spend the better part of the night socializing and feasting on the occasion’s special delicacies.

Other names of Yaldā

Yaldā extends on the longitude from the west of the Indian Sub-continent to Mesopotamia as well as the latitude from the Caucasus Mountains to the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea and to the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea.

(Central Iran): Shab-e Yaldā, Jashn-e Yaldā, Shab-e Chelle

(North of Iran): Show Chelle

(North West of Iran): Chilla Gejasi, Chelle Gijasi

(West of Iran): Shew vi Yeldā

(South and South West of Iran): Sho-e Chelle, Sho-e Yeldā

(South East, East and North East of Iran): Shaw-e Chelle, Shab-e Yaldā





ORIGINS: WHERE DOES YALDA COME FROM?



Historical backgrounds and resources

“Yaldā/Chelle” is regarded as one of the deeply-rooted and festive rituals amongst its bearers and practitioners in Iran, which depict many concepts, historical backgrounds and resources in view of its bearers and practitioners, most noticeable of which could be the following:

- Due to its nature-based characteristics, human creativity has been formed and diversified through centuries among generations.
- Respecting the diversity of expressions among communities, groups and individuals within its territory.
- Dominance of light over darkness symbolized by the rising of Sun on the day following Yaldā/Chelle, to defeat the devil (darkness).
- Yaldā/Chelle further reshapes mindset of local communities/groups and individuals in appreciating the beauty (positive aspect: Sun, light and warmth) hidden in a seemingly unpleasant condition (negative aspect: coldness of winter and darkness).
- Promoting a culture of peace, friendship, kindness and tolerance, fulfillment of promises and commitments are all celebrated in “Yaldā/Chelle” celebration.
- Solidarity in public participation in this celebration irrespective of gender, age, religion and ethnic differences.
- Promoting a culture of reading literary works and storytelling as well as listening to traditional music among the youth as executed by the elders.
- Paying more attention to shared rituals as ICH elements of the region, such as “Nowrouz” and Yaldā/Chelle would result in the establishment of mutual respect and peace amongst different ethnic groups, communities and individuals in the region.
- Paying attention to the spirit of the element, which enjoys abundance, light and warmth of life leads to more hope and increasing life expectancy amongst the bearers and practitioners.
- “Yaldā/Chelle” emphasizes on light, life expectancy and importance of fulfillment of commitments. These values are precisely in line with the Human Rights Declaration.
- “Yaldā/Chelle” accentuates on mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, which will result in social justice, solidarity, equality.
- By strengthening the cultural foundations and solidarity among communities, groups and individuals, “Yaldā/Chelle” facilitates the sustainable development.
- The significant participation by women and the children alongside with their grandparents at Yaldā/Chelle ceremonies would create safe and healthy learning setting between generations to learn about their sustainable future.
- Thanks to creating cultural and ethnic solidarity, each with its own language, beliefs and customs, “Yaldā/Chelle” acts as a powerful tool to ensure respect for nature, cultural diversity, human rights, peace and sustainable development in Iran.





CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS



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What happens on Yaldā?

On the occasion of the last night of autumn, families get together. This family reunion often takes place at the houses of elders where people meet around a table called “Yaldā/Chelle Night Sofre”.

“Yaldā/Chelle Night Sofre” consists of a lamp that symbolizes light, water that represents cleanliness, red fruits such as pomegranates, watermelons, beetroots, jujube and red and green grapes that demonstrate warmth along with serving broth (Ash), sweets, dried fruits and nuts special to this occasion, all set on “Yaldā/Chelle Night Sofre” and consumed during the nightly gathering. The Sofre usually comes in red and is traditionally spread on the floor or on Korsi/chairs. The red color used in various components of the Sofre refer to the reddish sky after the dusk and before the dawn.

The Special Appearance of Yaldā Night Celebration

The type of activities in this celebration ranges from reciting poems, storytelling, reciting Hafiz's poems or referring to them for pleasance omens, reciting verses from the epic poetic masterpiece of Shahnameh, listening to or playing music, singing and giving gifts to new in-laws/brides and children, indoor games and enjoying “Yaldā/Chelle Night Sofre” goodies and items.





CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS



Yaldā and red; the color of the celebration

The dominant color of the night is red. It is not only the pomegranates or the watermelon, which are red; most of the guests are also wearing the color. Red is considered to be the color of the crimson hues of dawn and glow of life. And the celebration of Shabeh Chelle is the celebration of the victory of light over darkness. To magnify the importance of light, usually lots of candles and light decorations are used in houses and gardens on this night. In some places, the festival is held with fireworks.





CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS



Yaldā Night, fun-filled heritage for kids

Women play a key role in this ceremony. Children are also considered as the future bearers/practitioners of the element. The elders are valued as its bearers.

While observing “Yaldā/Chelle” items such as cultural identity, attention to nature, and respect for women, friendship, hospitality, cultural diversity and peaceful coexistence are manifested and respected.

The remarkable point about the participation of children is the fact that while performing the ceremonial stages of this festive event such as storytelling, reading books, reciting poetry and preparation of festive dishes and table of “Yaldā/Chelle” all in all could enhance the kids’ self-esteem and internalize their learning.





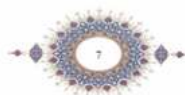
CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS



Foods and fruits in Yaldā night

It is widely believed among Iranians that if they consume summer fruits on this night, it is less likely that they will get ill in the coming cold season. Hence, an abundance of fruits, particularly watermelon and pomegranates, are served at the gathering. A bowl of special nuts is also a must on the Yaldā night. Often, a traditional dinner is offered to the guests present at the event.

Broth, sweets, dried fruits and nuts that are used specifically for the occasion are also set on the table and consumed during the gathering. Activities range from reciting poetry and storytelling to playing games and music and giving gifts to new in-laws, brides and children. The event celebrates cultural identity, nature, respect for women, friendship, hospitality, cultural diversity and peaceful coexistence. It is transmitted informally within families, although radio and television programs, publications, social media and educational materials have also played an important role in transmitting the practice in recent years.





CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS: HAFEZ-KHAANI IN YALDĀ NIGHT



Hafez-Khaani (reciting Hafez poems) on Yaldā

Shams Al-din Mohammad Hafez Shirazi is one of the most famous Iranian poets of the fourteenth century. He is highly valued and much loved by Iranians. Almost all Iranians keep a copy of Hafez's book of poems called Divan at their homes.

A significant book read on this occasion is the poetry book of Hafez, the celebrated Iranian poet of the 14th century AD. Usually, each family member makes a wish and randomly opens the book of Hafez and reads it aloud. That specific poem is known to express the interpretation of the wisher's hopes and beliefs. This is believed to link the aesthetic side of this night to a more religious side, when people pray and hope for fruitful days in the coming winter.

You may be wondering why Hafez is so much loved and what does he do with the celebration of Shabe Chelleh? Well, the answer is quite easy. Most of the Iranians believe that Hafiz answers back if you ask him a question from the bottom of your heart, or wish something. During Shabeh Chelleh, when everyone has eaten their food they would go one by one to the elder of the family, and he or she would do a Hafez Khaani for them. They would make a wish or ask a question and open the Divan, and the elder of the family would read Hafez's answer and interpret it for them.





CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS



Intense red color of pomegranates

Pomegranate is native to Iran and eastward up to north India. It is widely cultivated in most provinces of Iran, with different colors, sizes, and flavors. It is impressive to see the variety of pomegranates in the country. The ancient land is well-known for the quality of pomegranates and is the largest exporter of pomegranates in the world.

When it comes to Persian literature, pomegranate (Anaar) is there bearing metaphor or symbol. Some say pomegranates can be used to manifest a range of metaphors in Persian poetry due to its intense red color, round shape, and numerous seeds.

Every autumn, many pomegranate growers in Iran hold festivals to thank God and celebrate the harvest season. Alongside the grape and the fig, the pomegranate has played an important role throughout the Orient since the earliest times.

Ancient Iranians believed that the pomegranate was a sign of fertility due to its abundant seeds. It is a high pillar of festivities on Yaldā Night. Narratives say the presence of pomegranates symbolizes blessings for a new life. The number of seeds scattered indicates how many children a young woman may give birth to!

By tradition, Zoroastrians offer pomegranates to their daughters and sons when they get married, wishing them fertility. Moreover, they used to burn pomegranate sticks during religious rites.

Around 2000 BC, the Lur ethnic communities living in the west of Iran created amazing crafts which are known as Luristan bronzes today, and on some of the Luristan bronze objects, the pomegranate tree is recognizable.

Also, the pomegranate is seen in some bas-relief carvings inside the UNESCO-designated Persepolis, which was once the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings. Moreover, some Sassanid bas-reliefs depict pomegranates as a symbol of fertility and productivity.

The pomegranate has long been one of the essential ingredients for Persian cuisine to bring a kind of balance, taste, and flavor.





Yaldā Night, Ouds inscribed as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

"Yaldā Night or Shab-e-Chella", practiced in Iran and Afghanistan, and the musical instrument "Oud" have been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Yaldā Night or Shab-e-Chella refers to a traditional celebration of the sun and the warmth of life.



The event takes place on the last night of autumn when families gather at the houses of elders and sit around a table adorned with a series of symbolic objects and foods: a lamp to symbolize light, water to represent cleanliness, and red fruits such as pomegranates, watermelons, beetroots, jujube, and grapes to symbolize warmth.

Broth, sweets, dried fruits, and nuts that are used specifically for the occasion are also set on the table and consumed during the gathering.

Activities range from reciting poetry and storytelling to playing games and music and giving gifts to new in-laws, brides, and children.

The event celebrates cultural identity, nature, respect for women, friendship, hospitality, cultural diversity, and peaceful coexistence. It is transmitted informally within families, although radio and television programs, publications, social media, and educational materials

have also played an important role in transmitting the practice in recent years.

Events, conferences, training, workshops, and awareness-raising activities carried out by research centers, NGOs, cultural organizations and educational institutes have also had a significant impact on the proper transmission of the element to future generations.

Crafting and playing the Oud

During its seventeenth session, held in Morocco, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage also inscribed Crafting and Playing the Oud on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The oud is a traditional, lute-type instrument played in Iran and Syria. The musician places the short-necked instrument on their leg, fretting with one hand and plucking the chords with the other.

In both countries, the oud consists of a pear-shaped sound box made of walnut, rose, poplar, ebony, or apricot wood. Crafting an oud takes up to twenty-five days, during which the wood is left to dry and harden and is then treated with water and steam for fifteen days to build its durability.

Ouds are crafted in different sizes for different-sized bodies and decorated with wooden carvings and mosaic patterns.





NEWS

FM WIFE HOSTS CEREMONY ON YALDĀ NIGHT INSCRIPTION ON UNESCO LIST

The wife of the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted the wives of foreign diplomats residing in Tehran in a ceremony on the occasion of the international registration of Yalda Night on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

During its seventeenth session, held in Morocco, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage also inscribed "Yaldā Night or Shab-e-Chella", practiced in Iran and Afghanistan, and the musical instrument "Oud" on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In this ceremony, which was held at Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran, the guests were introduced to the ancient customs of the longest night of the year.

The cultural identity of Yalda night, its place and historical roots in Iranian culture and families, attention to nature and traditional chronology, and honoring the important position of women and children in the family, the friendship and hospitality among the Iranian families were explained to the guests, including a number of female ambassadors and wives of diplomats from more than 30 countries.

Introducing local clothes and languages of the tribes of different provinces of Iran, reciting poems of Ferdowsi Shahnameh, and introduction The Divān of Hafez were among other programs that were widely welcomed by the guests.





POMEGRANATE; GLORY OF RED RUBY AMONG YELLOW LEAVES OF AUTUMN

Pomegranate harvesting season in autumn depicts a unique beauty, and red ruby is eye-catching among the yellow leaves.

Besides religious tourism, Imamzadeh Sayyed Ali-Akbar village in Shahreza city of Isfahan province is famous for having the best pomegranate in terms of taste and color, as a pole of pomegranate production in Isfahan and Iran. One of the beauties of autumn in Shahreza city is the vibrancy of the pomegranate harvest season and the sight of red rubies in the heart of the yellow nature of autumn, the historical texture, the architectural form of the pomegranate gardens, which portrays the beauty of life for every tourist.





NEWS

PERSIMMON FESTIVAL IN NW TEHRAN

The 5th Persimmon Festival was held in the Iranian capital, Tehran.

The festival is a celebration of the persimmon fruit and features a variety of activities and events for visitors to enjoy. This year's festival was held in Kan neighborhood where a large portion of persimmons is produced. The Persimmon Festival is just one example of the many cultural attractions that Tehran has to offer.

In addition to its rich history and vibrant arts scene, Tehran is also home to a number of parks and gardens that are perfect for exploring on a sunny day. With so much to see and do, it's no wonder that Tehran is one of Iran's most popular tourist destinations.

