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OK Voices

## Where Poetry Meets Light: A Yalda Night Reflection

December 21, 2025

For me, Yalda Night has always symbolized the triumph of light over darkness. Growing up, my family would gather around the table with steaming cups of tea, bowls of pomegranates, and stacks of poetry books. The longest night of the year became a time not just to wait for dawn, but to celebrate hope, resilience, and the mystical beauty hidden in words and traditions.

I still look forward to the small rituals: cracking open a pomegranate and marveling at its jewel-like seeds, sipping tea infused with cardamom, and listening as someone reads a poem from Hafez. Each verse feels like a doorway into something deeper — a reminder that even in uncertainty, meaning and light can be found.

What I treasure most is the togetherness. Yalda taught me that no matter how long the night, sharing food, poetry, and stories with loved ones makes the darkness feel less heavy. It's a tradition that continues to inspire me, and one I carry with me even in new settings like our workplace community.

### A Brief History of Yalda Night

Yalda Night, also known as *Shab-e Yalda* or *Shab-e Chelleh*, is an ancient Persian festival celebrated on the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. The name Yalda comes from a Syriac word meaning "birth," reflecting its association with the rebirth of the sun as days begin to lengthen after the solstice. The tradition dates back thousands of years to pre-Islamic Persia and was formally recognized in the ancient Iranian calendar around 502 BC during the reign of Darius I. Originally rooted in Zoroastrian and Mithraic beliefs about overcoming darkness, Yalda Night became a cultural celebration of light, hope, and renewal. Families traditionally gather late into the night to share food, seasonal fruits like pomegranates and watermelons, poetry such as Hafez's verses, and stories, emphasizing togetherness and the symbolic triumph of light over darkness.

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