



FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

*INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
HOZERS*

A TALK ON
7 YALDAS FROM AROUND
THE WORLD!

DEC 20, 2021



ZOOM

8:45-9:45

TEHRAN

[HTTPS://YALE.ZOOM.US/J/98631966166](https://yale.zoom.us/j/98631966166)



7 Yaldas from Around the World!

The winter solstice, the longest night of the year, falls on December 21 or 22 in the Northern Hemisphere and on June 20 or 21 in the Southern Hemisphere. Since ancient times, people all over the world have recognized this important astronomical occurrence and celebrated the subsequent “return” of the Sun in a variety of different ways. Old solstice traditions have influenced holidays we celebrate now, such as Christmas and Hanukkah. We’ll talk about some solstice traditions both religious and cultural, both new and old to help light your way to longer days.

Yalda. The Persian festival Yalda, or Yalda Night is a celebration of the winter solstice in Iran that started in ancient times. In addition to Iran, Central Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and some Caucasian states such as Azerbaijan and Armenia share the same tradition and celebrate Yalda Night annually at this time of the year.

It marks the last day of the Persian month of Azar. Yalda is viewed traditionally as the victory of light over dark, and the birthday of the sun god Mithra. Families celebrate together with special foods like nuts and pomegranates and some stay awake all night long to welcome the morning sun.

Mithra:





Niayesh Balali: Soyal is the winter solstice celebration of the Hopi Indians of northern Arizona. Ceremonies and rituals include purification, dancing, and sometimes gift-giving. At the time of the solstice, Hopi welcome the kachinas, protective spirits from the mountains. Prayer sticks are crafted and used for various blessings and other rituals.

Kachina dolls: Brooklyn Museum, New York, Museum Expedition 1903, Museum Collection Fund (03.325.4653)



Midwinter in Antarctica

Even Antarctica gets its share of solstice celebration, thanks to the researchers staying there over the long, dangerously cold season. While those of us in the Northern Hemisphere are enjoying the most daylight hours, in the Southern Hemisphere they are celebrating Midwinter. Festivities include special meals, films, and sometimes even handmade gifts.

Palmer Station, Antarctica:



Athena Houshmandzadeh:

Inti Raymi

This solstice celebration comes in June rather than December. But for Peru it is a winter solstice, and this Incan celebration is in honor of the Sun god. Originally celebrated by the Inca before the arrival of Spanish conquistadors, the festivities included feasts and sacrifices, of animals or

possibly even children. The Spaniards banned the holiday, but it was revived (with mock sacrifices instead of real ones) in the 20th century and is still celebrated today.

St. Lucia's Day

St. Lucia's Day is a festival of lights celebrated in Scandinavia around the time of the winter solstice. Although it is now meant to honor St. Lucia, a Christian martyr, it has been incorporated with earlier Norse solstice traditions, such as lighting fires to ward off spirits during the longest night. Girls dress up in white gowns with red sashes and wear wreaths of candles on their heads in honor of St. Lucia.

A statue of St. Lucy on display during a Santa Lucia celebration in Syracuse, Italy:



Nafiseh Lotfi: Saturnalia

The ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia is perhaps the most closely linked with the modern celebration of Christmas. This festival happened around the time of the winter solstice and celebrated the end of the planting season. There were games and feasts and gift-giving for several days, and social order was inverted—slaves did not work and were briefly treated as equals.

The Temple of Saturn, among the ruins of the Roman Forum, Rome:



Dong Zhi

Dong Zhi, the “arrival of winter,” is an important festival in China. It is a time for family to get together and celebrate the year they have had. Based on the traditional Chinese celestial calendar, the holiday generally falls between the 21st and 23rd of December. It is thought to have started as an end-of-harvest festival, with workers returning from the fields and enjoying

the fruits of their labors with family. Special foods, such as *tang yuan* (glutinous rice balls), are enjoyed.

