



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Parsi Religion Ceremony History Prayer Gathas
Comparative Religion Shahnameh

Age Group (circle one): PreK-K Grades 1-3 Grades 4-5 Grades 6-8 Grades 9-12

Lesson # (if applicable):

Subject of the Lesson: Bundahishn

Background Knowledge for Teacher:

Introduction:

The story of Creation in Zoroastrianism is called the Bundahishn. It was written in the 9th century in the Pahlavi language. It reflects ancient Zoroastrian and even pre-Zoroastrian beliefs. There are two editions of this text – an older Iranian version called the Greater Bundahishn and a shortened Indian Bundahishn. Three major themes found in this text include creation, the nature of earthly creatures, and the Kayanians. Although it draws on the Avesta, it is not a sacred text.

As per the story, in the *Menog* (spiritual) period, Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) lived in Endless Light and Ahriman lived in the Station of Darkness. When Ahriman first saw Ohrmazd he tried to attack Ohrmazd but was unsuccessful and being scared returned to his station of darkness.

Ohrmazd knew that Ahriman would eventually be defeated because he did not have the power of the good mind. So Ohrmazd, to be fair, offered Ahriman a pact of peace. But Ahriman was ignorant and rejected Ohrmazd's pact of peace, which he believed Ohrmazd offered through weakness and helplessness.

Ahriman is believed to have said "I will not depart, I will not provide assistance for your creatures, I will not offer praise among your creatures, and I am not of the same opinion as you about good things. I will destroy your creatures forever; moreover, I will force all your creatures into not liking you and affection for me."

Ahriman remains out of action for an allegorical period of 3000 years.

Whereupon Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) recites the Ahunavar prayer (also known as the Yatha Ahu Vairyo). The prayer of Yatha Ahu Vairyo is stated to be most powerful to defeat evil. It is described in the Bundahishn as:

First part – first seven words – Yatha Ahu Vairyo, Atha Ratush Ashatchit hacha – Ahriman turns away as he is hurt.

Second part – second seven words – Vangehush Dazda Manangho, Shyothananam Agheush Mazdai xathrem – Ahriman is defeated



Third part – third seven words – Cha, Ahura Aa Yim Dregubyo Dadad Vastarem – Ahriman goes back into the dark hole.

Thereafter Ahriman remains out of action for an allegorical period of 3000 years while Ahura Mazda continues to create. In this time, Ohrmazd created the physical world (*Getig* period) as we know it, so that humans with the help of Ohrmazd and the seven creations could defeat Ahriman.

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First Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) created the sky as a fortification from which evil could not escape. Then beneath the sky, he placed the waters. On the 'waters he floated the earth' on which humans would live and trap evil. On the earth he planted 'the tree of all seeds' from which all other plants and trees could grow. Ohrmazd then created the good cow, to represent all animals and created the first human, *Gayomaretan*. From his own breath, Ohrmazd created the seventh creation, fire, whose warmth and radiance gave life to all the other creations.

After the end of the first 3000 year period, Ahriman awoke and attacked Ohrmazd's seven beautiful creations, causing destruction and chaos. Ohrmazd seeing the destruction brought by Ahriman, decided to send a special messenger, Spitaman Zarathushtra to help save the creations, restore happiness and bring peace and harmony to the world. With the help of Vohu Manah, the Good Mind, Zarathushtra spread Ohrmazd's message.

The *Getig* period is the current state that we live in.

In the last time period, Ohrmazd promises us that with the use of Vohu Manah (the Good Mind), the power of Asha (truth) and spreading Ushta (happiness), Ahriman will be rendered powerless. The world would once again experience Frashokereti - the world will ultimately be restored to the perfection it had at the time of creation, where time ceases to exist and the world remains in a perfect state.

Material for the teacher:

1. Teacher made materials like worksheets, Bundahishn story (Use 'Hello World' by Shazneen Gandhi); visual aids (pictorial representation of 7 Amesha Spentas and their symbols – handmade/ power point slides)
2. Masks for Ahura Mazda, Ahriman and the Amesha Spenta masks
3. Puppets representing the seven creations

Vocabulary:

Bundahishn; Creation; Ahura Mazda; Ohrmazd; Ahriman; Yatha Ahu Vairyo; Ahunavar; Menog; *Getig*; Frashokereti; Amesha Spenta (Holy Immortals); sky, water, earth, plant, animal, human beings, fire; Names of 7 Amesha Spentas (Khashatra Vairya, Haurvatat, Spenta Armaiti, Ameretat, Vohu Manah, Spenta Mainyu, Asha Vahishta);



Lesson for students:

1. Read and *introduce the Zoroastrian Creation Story*. Ask students to find the themes in the story (e.g.: good triumphs over evil despite several obstacles). The theme is the lesson or the message the story gives but should be inferred from the actions of the characters. What evidence in the story demonstrates the themes they have chosen?
2. Discuss the *qualities* of Ahriman (e.g.: greed, hubris, etc.) and Ahura Mazda (e.g.: benevolence, creativity). How do they compare? Are there characters in other stories that exemplify similar qualities? Are there other popular stories they have read with a similar theme of good v. evil or similar characters. How are those stories and characters similar and different from this story?
3. Discuss the importance of the *Ahunavar* (Yatha Ahu Vairyo) prayer. Explain that the Ahunvar prayer is what we call a Mantra. Mantras are simple, easy to remember prayers that should be prayed in repetition because they create positive vibes and help us call on Ahura Mazda for strength and wisdom to do the right thing even in the face of challenges. Connect this to how Ohrmazd used this prayer to defeat Ahriman in the Bundahishn.
4. *Concept of dualism* - Good versus evil. Introduce the concepts of Spenta Mainyu and Anghra Mainyu and how it is an integral part of our everyday choices. Give students several scenarios of everyday dilemmas such as cleaning your room v. rushing out to play, lying to your parents v. telling the truth, standing up for a stranger who is being bullied, and ask them to make choices for how they would act. Ask them for personal stories where they might have seen good prevailing. What did they do? Was it easy to step into a situation that they knew was wrong? Where did they find the strength to stand up for what is right?

Activity for Students:

1. Making Puppets or masks or using props related to the Bundahishn to tell the story of creation.
2. Arts and Crafts - making a toran with the seven creations
3. Dramatization/ Role Playing
4. Team Games related to good vs. evil; Jeopardy.



Sources:

1. The Good Life Book, ZAGNY: <https://zagny.org/shop/books/the-good-life-book-4th-ed/>
2. Hello World by Shazneen Gandhi
3. The Bundahishn - The Zoroastrian Book of Creation by Domenico Agnostini and Samuel Thorpe
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bundahisn-primal-creation>

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