



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

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

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

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 (see references below); visual aids (pictorial representation of 7 Amesha Spentas and their symbols – handmade/power point slides)

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. Ask students to research the historical context of the Zoroastrian Story of Creation including its time and compilation. Ask them to read the following quote by Mary Boyce and interpret it.

"A much more important and fundamental work of compilation is the Bundahishn ("Creation"), also called Zand-agahih ("Knowledge from the Zand"), which survives in two recensions, the Great (or Iranian) Bundahishn and a shortened version, the Indian Bundahishn (deriving from a different MS. tradition). One of the two great Zoroastrian compilations, this work probably grew through different redactions, from some time after the Arab conquest down to 1178 A.C. (when a few additions were made in imperfect Middle Persian). The last important redaction belongs to about the end of the 9th century. The Bundahishn has three main themes: creation, the nature of earthly creatures, and the Kayanians (their lineage and abodes, and the vicissitudes befalling their realm of Eranshahr). The compiler does not name individual sources; but shows an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Zand, and exemplifies excellently the process whereby treatises on chosen themes were created out of the scriptures. Many passages evidently derive fairly closely from the Middle Persian translation, for an Avestan syntax underlies them and one section consists simply of the translation of the 1st chapter of the Vendidad coinciding (except in small details) with the canonical Zand. Glosses and commentaries provide part of the continuous text, and in these, foreign learning is adduced. There are also a few isolated attempts to bring the work up to date, by the identification of traditional (and even mythical) geographical names with Arabic ones. In the main, however, the absorbing interest of the Bd. lies in the antiquity of its material. Here is preserved an ancient, in part pre-Zoroastrian picture of the world, conceived as saucer-shaped, with its rim one great mountain-range, a central peak thrusting up, star-encircled, to cut off the light of the sun by night; a world girdled by two great rivers, from which all other waters flow; in which yearly the gods fight against demons to end drought and famine, and to bring protection to man. Natural phenomena are speculatively explained; the sprouting of the plants, for example, is ascribed to the mythical Tree of All Seeds growing in the ocean, whose seeds are mingled with water and so scattered annually over all the earth when the god Tishtar brings the rains. Not only is the matter ancient and often poetic, but the manner of presentation, although arid, is of great antiquarian interest; for after the distinctively Zoroastrian account of creation, the speculative learning and legendary history is set out in traditional oral fashion, that is to say, in schematised mnemonic lists: so many types of animals, so many kinds of liquid, so many names of mountains, so many great battles. This is the learning of ancient Iran, as it must have been evolved and transmitted by generations in the priestly schools." (quoted from Mary Boyce, 'Middle Persian Literature', Handbuch der Orientalistik, 1. Abt., IV. Band, 2. Abschn., LFG.1, pg 40-1.)

2. How do you compare the Bundahishn to other stories of creation - like Adam and Eve, Aboriginal Dream Time stories. Creation stories are cultural, religious, or traditional myths that tell us about the origins of the world (cosmogony). Why do you think all religions need a creation story?
3. Ask students the following questions:
 - a. Zoroastrianism is a religion that values science & intellectual curiosity. How does one explain the concepts of a "creation story" with scientific evidence about the origins of the world (e.g.: Big Bang?)



- b. What is the value of preserving and teaching the Bundahishn story to younger generations?
4. What do you personally connect with from the Bundahishn? - Amesha Spentas; Gathas; Concept of Ahunavar (YAV); Hegemony; Duality - Good and Evil; Shahnameh (Kiyanians, rise of Mazdayasni religion)
5. Let's talk about the final Getig stage. Why are we still in this stage and why have we not yet achieved Frashokereti? Lead students to the idea of personal responsibility and choice as key even in the Zoroastrian Creation story. - What is our responsibility to bring about Frashokereti - Making world Wonderful?

Activity for Students:

1. Create presentation on a story of creation - Pictorial representation or power point slides
2. Write your own story of creation
3. How do you compare and contrast Creation vs. Evolution
4. Discuss your role as a Zoroastrian caretaker for the environment

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 Agostini and Samuel Thrope <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bundahisn-primal-creation>

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