



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Iranian Religion/Celebration 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: Donation in the Zoroastrian Religion

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

There are two forms of donation, monetary and non-monetary donation. Both kinds of donation are equally important and valuable in Zoroastrian culture.

Early Persian Empire:

Mobeds would accept donations from those who would donate part of their salary. These donations were sometimes dedicated to a particular cause referred to as Ashu Daud (a good cause). Some examples of Ashu Daud are to use the donation to build Atash Kadeh or help the needy. Mobeds would also use these donations to give money to farmers to cultivate the land, buy and protect the forests from owners who were planning to cut the trees to sell the wood, and use the money to negotiate the return of Persian soldiers who had been kept captive due to war.

Donation During the Sassanid Era:

Reasons for donating: To advance society, help the needy, build and improve, remembrance of those who passed (donation in the name of loved ones), blessing the soul after one's passing, and protect one's assets for their descendants.

Monetary donations were in two forms.

1. A finite sum of money would be donated for a specific purpose or where needed.
 - a. The expenses such as taxes, and guardian fee would be deducted and what was left would be used per donor's instructions and if no instruction was provided it would be used where needed.
2. A large sum of money would be donated where the principle would not be touched but the profit from the money would be used for an allocated purpose or where needed.
 - a. The profit per donor's instruction could be allocated to cultivate land, plant vineyards, orchards, build bridges, irrigation canals, fire temples, villages and for education. If any money was left from profit after using as described by the donor



would be used to pay taxes, pay the guardian of the donation, and give the surplus to the donor's heirs to use as they pleased.

Both men and women could establish a donation fund and donate it under their own name, a family member, or another person.

Usually, a guardian would be assigned to manage the funds. The guardian could be a family or a non-family member. If no guardian was assigned, then someone within the family would become the guardian. The donation could not be confiscated by the government, and it was non-transferable.

Personal advantages of monetary donation:

1. Blessing of one's soul after death
2. Remembrance of the donor's name or the name for whom the donation was made
3. A donation could not be confiscated by the government or transferred to another person. It was a way to safely keep the family inheritance and financially protect the descendants as any surplus from the donation would be given to the descendants as allocated in the trust. An example of such is that if a Zoroastrian family gives a donation to an organization or community then that donation (whether it's monetary, real-estate, stocks, etc) will always be safeguarded from either a government or ruler. This was especially important during the Islamic era of Iran because if one of the descendants of a Zoroastrian family converted to Islam then they could take all the family inheritance unless any of it was made as a donation. In other words, the inheritance would go from a Zoroastrian family to now a Muslim inheritor, but all donations would be kept within the Zoroastrian family, or community (as instructed by the donor), financially protecting them.

Inscriptions of monetary donation:

1. It is written on the Kabehyeh Zartosht, the Cube of Zoroaster, near Naqsh e Rostam in Pars that Shapur I donated to 5 fire temples. This donation was so extensive that the surplus of the donation was 1000 lambs annually which was given to his family.
2. Prime minister Mihr-Naresh from 5th century financed a bridge in the town of Gor (Firuzabad) which the ruins are still standing. He also founded 4 villages and built fire temples in each with gardens of date palm trees, olive trees, and cypresses in remembrance of himself and his sons and the blessing of their souls.

Legal institutions:

The donations were regulated by two departments that worked closely together.

1. "Archives for Religious Institutions"
2. "Register of Religious Foundation"



- a. This department's name is so close to the Arabic version of the same department which is led to the speculation about the possible Persian origin of Muslim *waaf*.
 - i. **The Islamic Trust (Waaf)**- This marks the use of an act of trust in entrusting the management and administration of one's estate in perpetuity to others for the benefit of Muslims.

Gahanbars:

One of the acts during Gahanbar (six seasonal celebrations) is donation. This donation can be in monetary form or non-monetary. Non-monetary donations could be helping to prepare the food-the donation of time and labor. Our agriculturalist and pastoralist ancestors would donate a portion of their cultivated crop, fruit, or animal products into a pool of community benefits, and the recipients received from the same pool. Both acts were done anonymously, as a religious duty, and not one was obliged to the other.

Donation after Islamic Iran:

Parsis became successful businessmen in India and toward the end of Qajar Era, Iranian Zoroastrians started to financially flourish.

Below are examples of donation through organizations and individuals but it certainly is not a comprehensive list. Many good organizations or individuals are not lists which the teacher can include.

Donations to further education:

1. Kaikhosrov D. Irani born in Bombay, India in 1922. He donated his assets to a few Zoroastrian organizations such as Zarathushtrian Assembly and FEZANA to promote the teachings of Zarathushtra.
2. Mobed Faridoon Zardoshty: scholarship for research in Zarthushti religion
3. Fali Chothia Charitable Trust: scholarship in education
4. Markar School in Yazd
5. "Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund", an organization founded in Bombay by Dinshaw Maneckji Petit built many schools and improved conditions for Zoroastrians in Iran by the benevolence of Maneckji Limji Hataria
6. Rostam Guiv Girl's School
7. Zoroastrian Charity Fund of Hong Kong

Donations to build Darb e Mehr

1. Mehraban and Feridoon Zartoshty: Fire temples and maintenance of centers
2. Rostam Guiv: contributed to building Darb e Mehrs in many locations including north America
3. Mehrafzoon Firoozgar and Abtin Sassanfar: Darbe Mehr in Tajikistan

Humanitarian Donations:



1. Baimai Surti Foundation: helped the needy get back on their feet.
2. Sir Ratan Tata: Donated against racism, relief of natural disasters such as flood, famines and earthquakes, Anti Tuberculosis League, donated a large part of his properties for charitable purposes.
3. Feeruza Bisney Shah: Donated her parents' eye after their passing, giving the gift of sight to four individuals.
4. Khush Bodhan: Provided free eye exam and donated eyeglasses to low-income countries.
5. Gram Seva Trust: Doctors helping rural needy children
6. Goshtasb Firoozgar: Firoozgar Hospital in Tehran still one of the most modern hospitals in Iran.

Lesson for students:

Introduce students to the importance of donation in Zoroastrian religion and how throughout our history donation was a big part of our culture.

As pastoralists/agriculturalists, our ancestors donated part of their crop or food obtained from their livestock in community gatherings. Even today we do a modern version of this donation specially during our Gahanbars.

During early Persian Empire, people donated part of their earnings to the Atash Kadeh for mobeds to use the money to preserve the environment and help the needy to get back on their feet.

In later Persian Empire organizations were formed to use the donations to build the country, cultivate, and help the needy.

Ask students how one can donate? This question is to lead the teacher to discuss examples of monetary and non-monetary donations and that both young and old, rich, and poor can donate depending on their ability.

Learning goal:

1. Donation is a part of Zoroastrian culture and has been practiced for a long time.
2. There was a system for donating during Sassanid Persian Empire that was very close to today's.
3. Gahanbars are one of the times that Zoroastrians practice donation.
4. Each one of us can practice donation.



Activity for Students:

1. Give students tasks to help at the next Gahanbar.
2. Plan to sell cookies at the next center gathering and donate part of the proceeds to the center and the rest for a class ice-cream party. (This will teach students to use part of their earnings for donation and part of it for their own use)
3. Have students make flyers or signs asking families to bring in blankets that they don't use anymore to donate to the local shelter.
4. Plan a gardening day at your center or local Tree People organization or similar facilities to donate time for the benefit of Earth and community.

Sources:

1. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/charitable-foundations-mpers>
2. https://fezana.org/fjissue/FEZANA_2014_03_Fall.pdf
3. https://fezana.org/fjissue/FEZANA_2011_01_Spring.pdf
4. Chehreh Nama 185 "Divar e Kootah e Mobedan" by Shahin Nezhad
5. <https://fcmbtrustees.com/page.php?a=islamic-trust>
6. <https://iranwire.com/en/features/5467>

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