



## FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

**Subject Category (circle one):** Iranian 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):** **1 of 2**

**Subject of the Lesson:** Environment (Taking care of environment)

### **Background Knowledge for the Teacher:**

As humans, our lives are inextricably linked to the environment. Our ancestors, knowing the importance of this connection, strived to protect nature. An important part of Iranian and Zoroastrian culture is to ensure that our interaction with nature occurs without harming the environment.

### **FOUR ELEMENTS:**

In Zoroastrian culture, creation is described by four important elements of nature. These four elements are earth, water, air, and fire. Protecting the environment and ecology is an important part of Zoroastrian teachings.

#### **WATER**

A great effort has been made by Iranians, to protect and use water properly. One example was the construction of subterranean aqueducts in desert regions as a method of not wasting water and keeping it clean. Iranians had religious obligations to keep water clean. For this reason, they did not put trash in water, or wash their clothes in running water. They were conscious of keeping the water clean as they understood the connection between sickness and unclean water.

#### **AIR**

Other examples of environmental protection can be seen in Iranian architecture. For example, special towers called “Badgir” in Persian, were used to direct air inside homes to help regulate the temperature. In the summer, the wind would cool the home, and, in the winter, they kept the warm air inside. In addition, this allowed Iranians to efficiently use subterranean spaces as part of their homes.

#### **EARTH**

It is important to produce less waste and dispose of waste properly. In addition, we need to protect trees and soil for maintaining healthy plants and animals.



## **FIRE**

Lighting fires in designated and appropriate areas in addition to not burning waste that would create hazardous chemical fumes into the air, is important.

## **PLANTS AND TREES**

Protecting plants and creating green environments is important to Zoroastrians. In Ancient Iran, killing a tree was considered wicked. It carried a punishment equal to that of murder! Many animals including dogs and seals were well protected.

## **USHTA/HAPPINESS**

Zarathushtra teaches us to live a happy life. This happiness is one that radiates out to others. (Ushta = radiant happiness). Happiness is for us, our family, community, and the living world. A happy life encompasses a healthy life; as one who is unwell, cannot experience full happiness. Also, a happy individual is more likely to be a beneficial member of the community.

Living according to Asha includes a life that is healthy, happy, and harmonious with nature. As such, we need to take care of the environment. We need to keep it clean; just as we do with our own homes. We share the Earth with other living and non-living beings. Therefore, keeping our environment clean, will benefit all those residing on Earth and lead to global happiness.

Today, we are the keepers of this important culture. We need to use today's advanced knowledge to carry on protecting the Earth.

## **CONNECTIONS TO THE CALENDAR**

Zoroastrian celebrations have a strong connection with ecology. These celebrations help remind us to stay connected with our environment and protect it.

The Zoroastrian Calendar is a testament to our connection to nature and cycles of the Earth throughout the year. Our ancestors understood and honored this connection. Many of the names given to each day in the Zoroastrian calendar relates to the natural elements such as Aban (water), Azar (fire), Baad (air, wind), etc. Each name can remind us of the particular element. The Zoroastrian monthly celebrations also have a close tie to nature.

## **WHEN THE DAY OF THE MAH (MONTH) IS THE SAME AS THE NAME OF THE ROZ(DAY)**

The monthly celebrations such as Khordadgan, Abangan and Tirgan are related to water. Since ancient times, Iran was not a land with abundant amounts of water, hence these special days brought people's attention to the conservation and protection of water and its correct and efficient usage.

Amordadgan is about planting trees and relates to plants. This celebration reminds us of protecting the forests, meadows, etc. Bahmangan is about protecting domestic animals. Since ancient times,



people have seen the importance of animals such as horses, cows, sheep, etc. in their lives. However, with advances in science, today we know the importance of protecting all animals.

Spendarmazgan is about protecting the Earth. Earth which is connected to water, soil and plants, is our most important resource and it is our duty to protect it and keep it clean. **Nabor** which is practiced four days in a month is about protecting domestic animals such as cow, chicken, etc. since on these days we do not consume meat.

**Gahanbars**, the six seasonal celebrations, represent a different aspect of nature. We remember and honor Air, Water, Earth, Fire, Animals, and Humans in each of these celebrations. They are seasonal and coincide with the harvest and other earthly cycles.

### **Lesson for students:**

Read or have students read the following story:

#### Kaveh's Story

Our story takes place many moons ago, when our ancestors lived in Iran. This was a time when the Iranian people were in touch with the land and were in tune with the cycles of nature; more so than we are today.

There once was a young boy named Kaveh. He was 10 years old and the youngest child in a family of six. He had two older sisters and three older brothers. Even though he had many siblings and would spend time playing with them, sometimes he enjoyed being alone.

Kaveh's family lived in a village in the North-Eastern part of Iran close to a river. Villagers used the river water for cooking and giving water to their animals. Kaveh's family kept horses and goats. Kaveh helped his parents tend to the animals. During his free time, Kaveh liked to walk among the trees, look at the mountains and notice the shape of the clouds. He would run with the river, sing with the wind, and watch the seasons turn.

Kaveh was born into a Zarthoshti family. His parents had taught him that keeping the environment clean and protecting all living beings was important. He had been taught to keep water, air, earth, and fire clean.

Although their lives were linked to the Earth and all the other creations, Kaveh could not understand all the fuss about keeping things clean. The Earth was so big and the rivers and oceans so vast, what did it matter if people took care or not? His own grandfather had died after seeing 60 winters. That was a good amount of time in those days. Now, that his grandmother was ill, he was sad to think that she may pass away soon. But she had also lived a long life and seen 63 winters!



Kaveh wondered, what could possibly happen in his lifetime if he did not keep the environment clean? According to him, “NOTHING!” In 50 years, he would be the same age that his grandfather had lived for. Kaveh could keep on living the way he wanted. Why should it matter to him how the Earth was left behind? He would be long gone!

One day, when he was taking a walk by the river, he noticed a woman washing her family’s clothes in the running water. He remembered that his mother always carried the water out of the stream to wash the clothes. He’d always thought how silly that practice was. Taking the water away from the stream, made extra work for his mother. Yet, she did it anyway.

Kaveh noticed that the woman was using a soapy substance to wash the clothes; whereas his mother always used fine sand found by the banks of a nearby lake to clean the dirt. As he continued walking, he noticed that the fish in the water were not swimming and were sluggish. Some were lying on their side. These looked like the same kind of fish the people in his village caught, dried, and ate as nourishment for the winter. He noticed the suds from the woman’s wash dancing in the water by the edges of the river.

Kaveh felt sad for the fish and for his village for not having enough fish for the winter. Something inside of him stirred and all the lessons and teachings of his family came back to him. All of a sudden, he understood the connections between all living things. He knew he had to do something.

So Kaveh walked back to the woman washing her clothes. He knelt to where she was on the river’s edge. When she looked up, Kaveh gently explained that the suds from her wash were making the fish sick. He explained that she could still wash her clothes, but there were other ways...

Story by Artemis Javanshir.

### **Activity for Students:**

#### **DISCUSSION:**

1. How do you think the woman reacted when Kaveh explained the impact of her washing directly in the river?
2. Why do you think Kaveh went through the trouble of going back and telling the woman the fish were getting sick?
3. How would his action help him, his family, community, and the Earth?
4. Does it really matter in Kaveh’s lifetime if some of the women started using suds in the river water?
5. Should Kaveh care what will happen to his family, community, or the earth after he dies? Why or why not?



Give examples of how our ancestors protected air, water, fire, and earth.

Talk about how the actions of even one person can make a difference. What if all of us made the excuse that one person cannot change/effect the world? Multiply that by the 1000s of years we have been living on Earth, times the billions of people. Where would we be now if all the “Kavehs” in the world decided to act selfishly?

Have you heard of the expression NIMBY? *NIMBY, an acronym for the phrase "not in my back yard", or Nimby, is a characterization of opposition by residents to proposed developments in their local area, as well as support for strict land use regulations.* [Wikipedia](#)

Do you think Kaveh was showing “NIMBY”ism? Do you see that in your own neighbourhoods? A good example is that we all need a place to dump our garbage. But if the dump was coming to your town, would people be o.k. with it, or protest?

**Sources:**

“Din Amooz” 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Barsam Publication  
Kaveh’s Story by Artemis Javanshir

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