



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):

Subject of the Lesson: Freedom in Zoroastrianism

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Goal: As a Zoroastrian we believe in freedom of choice and free will. That is, we have a hand in shaping our future, making our own decisions, and paving our own destiny by making beneficial daily choices. Students should understand there are events that we control and those that are out of our control. A good living is to exercise our freedom to shape the situations to benefit all.

Things we cannot control:

We all see events taking place around us that we do not have control over. For example, how our friend reacts when angry. We live alongside other animals on Earth and are a small planet in the Milky Way among thousands of other galaxies. We cannot change many things that surround us, for example, natural events such as earthquake, or storms causing destruction and death.

Things we can control:

We have control and freedom on many things in our lives including the choices we make. For example, if a student has not finished the day's homework, he/she can take the responsibility and make it a lesson not to repeat in the future or copy a friend's homework to turn in. We cannot fly and don't have control over gravity but by increasing our knowledge of the laws of physics, we have made airplanes to fly from one place to another.

Our freedom and how we can react to different events:

We cannot change how others react towards different events, but we can choose how to react ourselves. Humans can somewhat shape their family and their community. They can create and invent new tools. Faced with uncontrollable circumstances, we can do what we can to shape our lives and move ahead. We have personal freedom in our individual lives, in how we react to others or how we connect with our community, approach art, literature or how we use different tools such as guns.

Below are some examples of events out of control and choices we can make:

1. If fire sirens go off in school, each student may react differently. We must learn to confront events which are out of our control with constructive attitude and tools of improvement. For



the mentioned situation if a student is not acting rationally during a fire alarm, we can talk to them to calm them down or help them to the correct exit. We may not be able to control the school fire, but authorities can place fire extinguishers around school to help put out the fire.

2. After a heavy storm, communities can help one another in rebuilding the damaged homes. We use the energy from wind, sun, and water to create electricity. We created ships and submarines to travel the oceans, seas and explore under water. We continuously seek to explore and create changes in our environment.

A realistic approach to life is one that correctly expresses our constructive attitude toward things we can and cannot control. In the Gathas, composed by Ashu Zarathushtra about 3800 years ago, he talks about using our good mind and personal freedom to find constructive solutions.

Gathas, Yasna 31 Verse 11 (Song 4.11):

**“O Wise One, at the beginning,
You, through Your mind,
Fashioned for us the living world,
Conceptions and intellects,
Put life in the physical frame,
And gave deeds and words,
So that one makes his choice through free will.”**

Translation by Dr. AA Jafarey

We live in a world created with properties out of our control, however, we have been created with strengths such as intellectual thinking. We are in control of what we say and do. There is another lesson in the above verse and that is as humans have freedom and liberty, and with this freedom comes the acceptance of responsibility for what we say and do.

Yasna 48 Verse 4 (Song 13.4):

**Whoever, Wise One, has set his mind on the better or the worse,
Sets his conscience accordingly with actions and words.
His desire follows his cherished choice.
But in Your wisdom, the end of the two will be different.**

Translation by Dr. AA Jafarey

Our thoughts pave the way for our deeds. If we set our mind toward productivity, righteousness, fairness and beneficial living our action will follow and will lead to a better living. A mindset for wrongdoing, and druj will result in the worse living.



Good to know:

Historically, there have been individuals who have tried to change the circumstances within their surroundings and believed that humans are not subject to fate.

1. One of these individuals was Pashootan Ji Dusabhai Markar born in 1871, India. He was a Zoroastrian living in India and cherished the love for his motherland. He continuously thought of ways to improve the lives of the Zoroastrians living in Iran.

He understood that educating the youth and providing them with helpful tools is the best way to improve the community. He established educational boarding facilities for girls and boys of low-income families regardless of religion to get educated and learn a trade, or art. He provided an opportunity for these children to have a home, food, proper education and to be beneficial members of their community as an adult. Markar made a difference and showed that each person can make the world a better place.

Below is a narrative recounted about Markar:

Markar's trade was mostly in India, but he traveled a lot due to work and management of the boarding schools in Iran. He used a thrifty method of travel. People would ask him, why he would pain himself when he could travel in style and comfort. Markar would answer that the money saved from a thrifty travel would pay for a child's education.

2. Another of these individuals was Farangis Shahrokh Yeganegi She was born in 1916 in Iran daughter of another individual who used his liberty to improve lives, Keykhosrow Shahrokh.
"Farangis was the honorary President of Zoroastrian Women Organization, the first Executive Director of Iranian Handicraft Organization, member and Director of South California Zoroastrian Center, and founder of Yeganegi-Kaykhosrow Shahrokh Library. She rendered invaluable services to the Iranian society and specifically to the Zoroastrian community, among them the printing of books related to the culture and civilization of Iran. She was also one of the founders of the Anjuman of Ancient Iranian Culture and took important steps in improving the state of women in prisons." 2

She was the co-establisher of Ancient Iranian Organization, helped improve orphanage, and she was a pro women's activist. She received woman of the year by UCLA and in 1996 received medal of honor by FEZANA (Federation of Zoroastrian Association of Northern America).



Lesson for students:

Build a foundation for discussion.

1. Use the PowerPoint “Freedom in Z-PP”, edit if needed to adjust to your class’s needs and use it to present the material to students.
2. Use the material provided in “Material for Teacher” and design a lesson best suited to your students. Below are some ideas to start.
 - a. What are some of the things we can and cannot control and how much of our lives are controlled by the two? Lead students to examples of natural disasters both personal and environmental in addition to social situation such as bullying.
 - b. How can we react to things that are out of our control? Give examples and find solutions in a class discussion.
 - c. As Zoroastrians how are we encouraged to live our lives in relation to our freedom?
3. Have students read the verses of the Gathas mentioned in “Material for Teacher” section and guide students in understanding freedom according to Zarathushtra’s teachings or use it as activity as described in #4 section of “Activity for Students”.

Activity for Students:

1. Give an example of a current event and brainstorm with students as how a Zoroastrian would use his/her liberty to improve the situation. For example, climate change, or health care in US.
2. Discuss: What are the boundaries of freedom in Zoroastrian doctrine?
3. Make a project for students
 - a. Give students a suggested list of benevolent Zoroastrians or non-Zoroastrians who helped in the spread of Zarathushtra’s teachings (ex: Anquetil du Perron).
 - b. Have them choose a person from the list or one of their own choosing to give a report of how the individual used his/her liberty to improve the lives of others or benefit the Zoroastrian community.
4. Have the three verses of the Gathas printed in the “Material for Teacher” section ready. Break the class into three groups. Give them 5 minutes to read and discuss the verse then a representative from each group will talk about the verse. How it relates to things we can and cannot control and living a Zarathushti life.

Sources:

1. Amoozesh e Din o Farhang e Zartoshti 7th grade.
2. <http://www.amordaden.blogfa.com/post/919>

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