



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: Gâhanbârs

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

What are the Gahanbars and what is their importance?

Gahanbars are six seasonal thanksgiving festivals or high feasts when Zoroastrians assemble to eat and share food communally. They are joyous occasions at which rich and poor meet and work together, new friendships are formed, and old disputes resolved. While each Gahanbar traditionally spans five days, nowadays it is the last day that is usually observed.

The giving of food and monetary donations are contributed anonymously according to a person or family's means. Community members volunteer to prepare the food for the occasion and serve the meals without regard to status. Everyone sits together and partakes in the same food. The customs are an expression of egalitarian communal togetherness. The free and equal sharing of food with everyone, the environment of togetherness, goodwill and sharing - all serve to help build and strengthen the community.

What does Gahanbar mean?

The Gahanbar celebration is an ancient celebration. The names of the six Gahanbars are mentioned in Yasna 1.9 and Vispered 1.2. We find the word "gah" in Pahlavi, Middle Persian texts. The Lesser and Greater Bundahishns (25.1) mention the division of the year into the period of the six Gahanbars and calls them "gah", divisions (some translate as "seasons"), of the religious calendar.

Some derive Gahanbar from gah-anbar meaning time-gathering, the time for gathering (food and people) or assembly-time. Gah-anbar could also mean time-for-storage in Persian. The name therefore signifies the period for storing food (or accessing stored food in winter). The dried fruits and nuts, called lork in Persian, are distributed and collected by the assembly for storage.

Gahs (pl.) are the periods into which a day is divided. It could also be taken to mean the periods into which a cycle of time such as a day, a month or a year is divided. Another interpretation of the word Gahanbar comes from the Avestan word ham-bairya meaning collective action.

Gahanbars are important times for a pastoralist and agriculturalist community when they plant crops, harvest, or take their animals for the last grazing before the snow fall.



Seven Acts of Piety

The Gahanbars are seen as manifestation of seven acts of piety and goodness:

1. Generosity of the spirit (including speaking well of others)
2. Material generosity & sharing
3. Honesty
4. Community participation and inclusion (including supporting the Gahanbars)
5. Selfless help towards those in need (without desire for recognition or reward)
6. Piety
7. Remembrance of the souls of the righteous and one's ancestors.

The number seven plays a significant role in all Zoroastrian and Zoroastrian-based customs and rituals. Seven stands for the divine seven, God and God's six attributes. There are also seven aspects to corporeal creation (gaiety): fire, air, water, earth, plants, animals, and human beings.

The Six Gahanbars

There are six Gahanbars - each with its own theme celebrating each of Ahura Mazda's creations - observed during the year.

Name of Gahanbar	In honor of Ahura Mazda's creation	Season	Approximate date according to Gregorian Calendar
Maidyozarem-gah (Mid Spring)	sky	Mid-Spring	April 30 th -May 4 th
Maidyoshahem-gah (Mid-Summer)	water	Mid-Summer	June 29 th -July 3 rd
Paitishahem-gah (End of Summer)	Earth	Harvest time	September 12 th - 16 th
Ayathrem-gah (Beginning of Winter)	Plants	Herding time	October 12 th - 16 th
Maidyarem-gah (Mid-Winter)	Animals	Mid-Winter	December 31 st - January 4 th
Hamaspahmaidem-gah (End of Winter)	Human	Mid path of all	March 16 th -20 th

Hamaspahmaidyem, the last Gahanbar celebrated during the five days before Nowruz, is the most significant. Hamaspahmaidyem (or Hamaspahmaedaya) Gahanbar, is a Gahanbar devoted to remembering the fravashis (fravahr/guardian angels/souls) of those who have passed away.

Details of Gahanbar Festival:

Gahanbar is an ancient festival which, like many years ago, is still being held in the Zoroastrian houses in Taft City and other villages with Zoroastrian residents.

Traditionally, Gahanbar is the day of opening the homes to guests for parties and charity. Gahanbars are held once or twice in each house annually. The owner of the house would donate his agricultural and animal products as well as anything he has gained by working throughout a year to everyone who steps to the door of his house.

In Gahanbar, the traditional ovens will be ignited, bread will be baked in the oven and the smell of baking bread wafts out the door to reach the souls of the house owners' ancestors. A fried bread called Sirog is also cooked not only for humans, but also for dogs which are considered as the protectors of the houses and villages, and for fish which clean the qanats (a gently sloping underground channel or tunnel constructed to lead water from the interior of a hill to a village below).



Image: Making sirog.

Sir-o-seda (sir-ground garlic and seda-a desert plant) is another dish prepared commonly during Gahanbar. -A sofreh (tablecloth) is spread in the "Clean Room" (a room for prayers) to remember the deceased relatives. The sofreh contains a portrait of Ashu Zarathushtra, lork (dried fruit and nuts), sirog (fried bread), sir-o- seda, fried eggs (placed on top of the sirog), fruits, milk, water, wine, a few stems of moort/moord (the sacred plant used by mobed during the prayers), and candles. A light should always be turned on in the room and those who want to enter should be clean.



Above images: Gahanbar spread.

When the priest enters the house wearing white, he brings tranquility and cleanness to the house. He steps into the clean room, sits there, and recites Avesta while people gather in other rooms and courtyard to listen.

Lork, a mixture of nuts and dried fruits is an essential part of each Gahanbar. Lork will be distributed equally among all who are present, whether they are kings, peasants, or children, all have equal shares.



Image: Sharing of lork.

Some houses also offer bread and lunch besides lork. This is called bread Gahanbar.

Today, Gahanbars are celebrated at Zoroastrian centers. Volunteers usually gather the day before to prepare the sirog (special fried bread) and aash (stew). This offering is either donated by a family in remembrance of a loved one who has passed away or in the form of communal donation of food or monetary means. The Mobed recites the Avesta, lork (dried fruit and nuts) is shared and the community gathers to eat together and socialize.



Lesson for Students:

1. What do you know about Gahanbar?
2. Have you participated in one? What was your experience?
3. Use either of the two PowerPoints provided emphasizing the main points in the material for teachers' section. (You may want to substitute your students' names for the names in the story "Story of Sara" PowerPoint.)
 - a. What are Gahanbars?
 - b. How many Gahanbars do we have and why?
 - c. Why do we celebrate Gahanbar?
 - i. Working and sharing as a community
 - ii. Donation and helping one another.
 - iii. Items on Gahanbar spread.

Activities:

- 1) Invite the students' families to set up a Gahanbar table & celebrate.
- 2) Class discussion:
 - a. We celebrate Gahanbars at specific times during the year. What is the seasonal significance of these times?
 - b. What are the main contributions of Gahanbar to the community? Discuss each point separately.
 - i. Rich and poor prepare/share food, sit at the same table to enjoy.
 - ii. Finding out if a family or center needs help. This will promote a communal helping hand.
 - iii. Donation-monetary and non-monetary to improve the center and help the families who are financially struggling.
 - iv. Importance of happiness in Zoroastrianism-Getting together and showing kindness and cooperation brings happiness.
- 3) Make sirog with your class to share with students in all classes.
- 4) Make a video about Gahanbar and share with your center.
- 5) Make a Kahoot game to play with your class.
- 6) Have students play a game to donate rice to needy locations.
<https://www.wfpusa.org/freerice/>



Source:

1. <https://mehmoun.com/2762/#:~:text=log%2Flork%2C%20a%20mixre%20of,which%20are%20called%20bread%20Gahanbar.>
2. www.czc.org
3. <https://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/gahambar/index.htm>
4. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/fravasi->

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Date: 8/2022