



## FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan Template

**Subject Category (circle one):** Religion/Ceremony 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):** Post-Sassanid Empire- Lesson 4

**Subject of the Lesson:** Zoroastrians in Iran from 1800-2023

### Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

#### Background:

After the Islamic Arab invasion of Iran, the minorities including Zoroastrians were severely persecuted. Due to sever social, economic, and religious restrictions, the Zoroastrian fled to other countries including India. Their population from once millions fell to only about 7000 by the 1800’s. The Society of Amelioration of the Condition of Zoroastrians in Persia established by the Zoroastrians in India (Parsis) funded an expedition by Maneckji Limji Hataria to Iran to evaluate the condition of Zoroastrians in Iran.

#### Parsis’ aid to Iranian Zoroastrians

Seth Maneckji Limji Hataria (1813-1890) was born in a small village near Surat, India. He was brought up to take pride in his cultural heritage and history of ancient Iran. He was fluent in Gujarati, English, Urdu, and Farsi. Many refugees from Iran to India reported on the dire conditions of the Zoroastrians in Iran. To inquire about the extent of these reports, Maneckji on behalf of the Society of Amelioration of the Conditions of Zoroastrians in Persia was sent to Iran to evaluate the situation. Maneckji arrived on the shores of Iran in Spring of 1854. Upon visiting Zoroastrians in Iran, he wrote, “I found [them] to be exhausted and trampled, so much that even no one in this world can be more miserable than them.”

Maneckji’s report indicated that the dire condition of Zoroastrians in Iran was mainly due to

1. Jizya-the extra tax enforced on Zoroastrians. The tax was two or three folds from the norm to provide the local governor or the tax officials with their ‘cuts’. The burden of this tax forced some Zoroastrians to convert to Islam or abandon their families in fear of flogging and punishment.
2. Demeaning laws posed an inferior status of Zoroastrians.
3. Lack of leadership in the community.
4. Lack of community funds and fear of persecution resulted in the places of worship and burial sites falling to despair.



A fund was provided by Parsis to revive the Zoroastrian community in Iran. Maneckji's strategy was to end jizya and other forms of social and legal discrimination, build educational institutions and reform religious practices, foster leadership in communities, and raise the status of the Zoroastrian religion and community in Iran. These had to be achieved through diplomacy, gifts, political pressure through contacts in India, Iran, and Britain.

Maneckji spent almost 30 years in Iran and below are some of his accomplishments:

1. Restoring Atash Bahram in Yazd to boost morale.
2. New Dar-e-Mehr and dakhmas were built.
3. It took him 26 years and hefty funds to abolish jizya for all minorities.
4. Between 1860-1882 a dozen free schools were set up for boys and girls
  - a. Parsi teachers came to Iran and Iranian teachers were sent to India for training.
  - b. Focus of the curriculum was on science and English.
  - c. Many families depended on their boys working, so Maeckji provided generous grants so the boys could stay in school and later were sent to India for further study.
5. Religious reforms
  - a. Animal sacrifice was abolished.
  - b. Reinforced Zoroastrian laws of marriage and divorce
  - c. Discouraged polygamy.
  - d. Provided dowry to poor Zoroastrian girls.
  - e. Re-started Zoroastrian religious festivals including gahanbars.
  - f. Zoroastrians gained confidence to wear sedreh and koshti again which was discarded for fear of humiliation and attacks.
6. Leadership and Anjumans
  - a. He established the first Anjuman in Yazd and Kerman
  - b. Formed a group of elders to oversee community matters
  - c. Anjumans were formed in Tehran, Isfahan, Karaj, Shiraz, and in Zoroastrian villages.
  - d. Enabled anjumans to set up waafs or religious trusts, focused on charitable donations. This allowed anjumans to maintain schools, hospitals, places of worship, and dakhme, etc.
  - e. Oversaw the building of Atash Kadehs, qanats (underwater irrigation channels), badgirs (air-conditioning towers).
  - f. Encouraged Parsis to fund medical buildings, clinics, and sent doctors from India
7. Raising the status of Zoroastrian religion
  - a. Argued for Zoroastrians to be accepted as a "religion of book."
  - b. Associated Zoroastrian religion with the Iranian past which was attractive among progressive Muslims elite.



- c. As Zoroastrians became educated their economic conditions improved and they participated in the struggle of civil and political rights.

### Iranian Nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

In the early 1900's Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians worked together to raise awareness about Zoroastrian faith and pre-Islamic national identity. A few of these notable Zoroastrians include:

1. Peshotanji Dossabhai Marker (1871-1965)  
His charity was mainly education based. The Marker family were successful in several industries, including pharmaceutical and banking enterprises in India.
2. Ardeshir Edulji Reporter (1865-1932)  
He lived in Iran for more than 30 years and assisted Marker in the construction of the Marker Orphanages in Yazd (1932), Marker Boys' and Girls' High Schools, and smaller primary schools in areas surrounding Yazd and Kerman. He asked Ratanbanu Bamji Tata for donation to expand Anushirvan Dadgar and Firuz Bahram schools in Tehran. Both schools were originally built through Parsi charity. They were not exclusive to Zoroastrians but open to all faiths. Many notable Iranians attended the Zoroastrian based schools. Some of these individuals include Princess Fatimeh Pahlavi (1928-1987), and Prime Minister Hassan Ali Mansur (1923-1965).
3. Keikhosrow Shahrokh (1875-1940)  
He was born in Kerman, Iran into poverty. Through Parsi charity he gained access to education in Iran and then in India. He published two instrumental books used as curriculum in Zoroastrian founded schools in Iran. He served on Iranian Majles (Parliament) from 1909-1940, drafting constitutional guarantees to protect Iran's non-Muslim communities, and establishing the Ferdowsi memorial building in Tus are some of his contributions.
4. Dinshah J. Irani (1881-1938)  
With the help of other Parsi philanthropists, he established two civic organizations that were instrumental in teaching about pre-Islamic history and Zoroastrian religion, the Iranian Zarathushti Anjuman (est. 1918) and the Iran league (est. 1922). He was fluent in Persian and was a scholar of Persian literature and partner of Bombay law firm, Mulla and Mulla. Some of the books published by the famous scholar Ebrahim Purdavud (1886-1968) were founded by the above organizations.

### Urban Migration

As Iranian Zoroastrians became more educated and less persecution was implemented, they moved out of Yazd and Kerman to urban areas such as Tehran for economic opportunities. Some of these individuals became successful and in turn gave back to the country and Zoroastrian community.



### Zoroastrians after Islamic Republic of Iran

After the 1979 Iranian revolution and establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, increased pressure was placed on Zoroastrians and some of the old discriminations were implemented such as:

1. Pressure on children to attend Islamic classes.
2. Some consider Zoroastrians unclean.
3. Torture and killing of those who help non-Zoroastrians (especially those born Muslim) to initiate into Zoroastrian religion.
4. Torture and abuse for voicing the slightest disagreement to Islam.
5. If a sibling converts to Islam, that sibling will receive all the inheritance leaving the others totally deprived.
6. Compensation for accidental death of a Zoroastrian is less than that of a Muslim.
7. Well-paying jobs and top educational opportunities are denied of Zoroastrians.

### **Lesson for students:**

- Lesson Objectives / Learning Targets:

To get a perspective of the importance of Parsis aid to revive the Zoroastrian religion in Iran and to greatly improve the lives of Iranian Zoroastrians. The students should leave with the importance of helping the community members whenever possible and realize the essential effect of an organized and dedication of a small group of individuals in saving a community.

- Essential Questions:

- Why were the Zoroastrians in India interested in the living conditions of the Zoroastrians in Iran? Why did they fund an expedition to Iran? How would they benefit from this expedition?
- How did Maneckji Hatavia accomplish so much in such a small amount of time? What organizational skills did he possess?
- In a short span of time, the Iranian Zoroastrians rose to great heights. Does this success have anything to do with their religious beliefs?

- Materials Needed:

- Any material needed to teach the lesson effectively, such as, white board, handouts, maps, etc.

- Introduction / Anticipatory Set:

- In the 1800s the population of Zoroastrians in Iran had decreased from millions to only a few thousand and diminishing with passing time. However, under extreme pressure



many stayed true to their beliefs. Soon a superhero would come along to change everything.

- Vocabulary: dakhme, gahanbar, sedreh and koshti, anjuman, waff, badgir
- Lesson Procedure:
  1. Use the accompanying PowerPoint to present the lesson and follow up with an activity from the “Activity for Students” section.
  2. Combine the lesson with activity as presented below.
    - Direct Instruction: (10 - 15 minutes)  
Discuss the lesson as presented in the “Knowledge Content for Teacher”.
    - Guided Practice:  
Ask students to call out some of the important actions taken by Manekji and other benevolent individuals leading to the success of the Zoroastrians in Iran. Then ask students in their opinion, which of the mentioned actions had the most impact and why.
    - Independent Practice:  
Ask students to make a Venn diagram comparing the situation of Zoroastrians in Iran today to that before Manekji’s arrival in Iran.
    - Summary/closing activity:  
Zoroastrians around the globe have a common core belief. In this lesson we learn that under extreme circumstances they have persevered and kept their ancestral faith and their communal beliefs. Charity is an important part of Zoroastrian tradition. This charity is not only for the benefit of Zoroastrians but extended to other faiths and communities as well. Even under extreme pressure, we can persevere and shine.
    - Learning Extensions:  
Ask students to research and choose a Zoroastrian benefactor and share their findings in the next class.
    - Assessment:

Which part of the lesson worked well, and which part needs to improve?

### **Activity for Students:**

1. Have students categorize Manekji’s efforts in Iran from what they think was the most effective to the least effective. Have students share their findings with class and discuss their choices.
2. Have students make a Venn diagram comparing the Zoroastrians’ situation in Iran before the arrival of Manekji and Zoroastrians in Iran today. Share with class.
3. The two activities above can be implemented for a virtual class using whiteboard on Zoom.



4. Discussion:

Design questions to stimulate discussion:

EX: We are a community living in North America, with many of the freedoms and opportunities that the Zoroastrians in Iran lack. How can we help the Zoroastrians in Iran?

5. Break the class in two or four groups and have them research the four mentioned notable Zoroastrians mentioned in the lesson and present their findings. How did their contribution affect the lives of others?

**Sources:**

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4. <https://fezana.org/stories-of-persecution-extreme-violence-against-zoroastrians-in-iran-the-fezana-talks-13/>
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