



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Parsi Religion/Ceremony Celebration History Prayer
Gatha Comparative Religion Shahnameh

Age Group (circle one): PreK-K Grades 1-3 Grades 4-5 **Grades 6-8** Grades 9-12

Subject of the Lesson: Life and Legends of Zarathushtra

Background Knowledge for Teacher:

Who is Zarathushtra

Spitamam Zarathushtra is our prophet. His date of birth varies from 6000 BCE to 3000 BCE. He is believed to be born in the city of Rae, in present day Afghanistan.

Zarathushtra's father's name was Pourushaspa (Keeper of Camels) and Mother's name was Dughdova (milk maid).

There are several legends of Zarathushtra's birth. It is believed before he was born, a bright light appeared around his house. He was born with a smile on his face. Many attempts were made to kill him by evil men. He was thrown into fire, which turned into flowers; he was thrown into a herd of cattle, where a white bull saved him by standing guard over him.

When he grew up, Zarathushtra was deeply disturbed with what he witnessed around him: a degradation of the human spirit, harm to animals, and the destruction of the environment. The degradation of the human spirit was manifest in unprincipled living, greed and violence. It is believed around the age of 20, he went in search of a spiritual quest, to get answers to questions that he had. At the age of 30, Zarathushtra received a revelation from Ahura Mazda, through Vohu Manah (the Good Mind).

The approach that Zarathushtra used was unique for his times. Rather than seeking to bring about this change with the use of power, authority, and coercion, Zarathushtra sought to bring about change through reason, wisdom, and empowerment of the downtrodden. His precepts are found in the form of inquiries about the creator and the universe, and ethical concepts as code of conduct and moral values.

Teachings of Zarathushtra are found in the Gathas. Some of the key messages include:

- a. Concept of omniscient creator Ahura Mazda
- b. Concept of duality – Spenta Mainyu vs. Angra Mainyu. . Zarathustra emphasized the “enlightened mind” as a tool for the making the fundamental choice between the two spirits, one that takes us closer to Ahura Mazda's ideal through wisdom and following the path of Asha (righteousness) and the other destructive spirit that wishes to remain in ignorance and darkness.



c. Attributes of Ahura Mazda – The six Amesha Spentas help us best understand God’s connection with creation and are also ideals that all humans can aspire to. Possessing these qualities such as the good mind, ordered and righteous living, serenity and holistic living, leads one to be in harmony with God’s work.

Zarathushtra’s first disciple was his cousin Maidhyoimanha. His first *Royal Patronage* was Kai Vishtaspa (of Kiyanian Dynasty) and Hutaosha. It is said that one day when King Kai Vishtaspa was riding his horse, the horse suddenly collapsed as his legs buckled under him. Many eminent doctors were brought in, but no one cure him. When Zarathushtra and Maidhyoimanha heard about this, they went to the King and offered to cure the horse. The King was so desperate that he agreed. Zarathushtra is said to have recited four Ahunavars (Yatha Ahu Vairyo). During recital, with each *shyothananam* Zarathushtra pulled the leg out until all four legs were restored. The King became so happy that he inquired about Zarathushtra’s prayers and his message and accepted this religion. This story also has an allegorical representation. The name of the horse was Aspe-siha meaning the black horse. The story represents the awakening of King Vishtaspa’s mind through the power of prayers.

There are some special days associated with Zarathustra. Khordad Saal, celebrated on Khordad roj of Farvardin mah symbolizes the birth of Zarathushtra while Zarathosht-no-diso on Khorshed roj of Dae mah represents the passing away of the prophet from the material to the spiritual existence.

Material for the teacher:

Books on Zarathushtra’s life – See books mentioned under “**Sources**”.

Suggested Teaching Aids:

1. Research on Zarathushtra
2. Geographical and historical background to Zarathushtra's origins
3. Globe/map to show placement of Iran
4. Story of Zarathushtra

Vocabulary:

Spitamán Zarathushtra (Keeper of Camels); Asho Zarathushtra; Prophet; Zoroaster (Greek name); Father’s name - Pourushaspa and Mother’s name - Dughdova (milk maid); Maidhyoimanha (First disciple - his cousin); Kai (King) Vishtaspa and Queen Hutaosha (First royal patronage); Rae; Aral Sea; Ahura Mazda; Gathas; Spenta Mainyu; Vohu Manah;

Lesson for students:

1. Ask students to narrate what they remember learning about the story of Zarathushtra’s birth and life. Many students will focus on the legends of Zarathushtra’s birth. Ask them why these instances were strongly etched in their memory. What does that tell us about why people might have created these legends around Zarathushtra’s birth?
2. Zarathushtra had to face many obstacles in trying to get people to accept his way of thinking and the knowledge. Why was it such a challenge? (eg: because it contradicted their personally



held beliefs, superstitions, and way of life.) Have you been in situations where you have had to change someone's perspective about something? Did you succeed - How did you manage to persuade someone to understand your perspective even if it is different to theirs?

3. Show students 4 different pictures of Zarathushtra holding a navgar, gurz, fire, or scroll and ask them to infer what each of the objects may symbolize.
 1. Navgar, a knotted stick is a reminder of Zarathushtra's priestly identity.
 2. Gurz, a mace with a head of a cow, symbolizes triumph of good over evil and is connected to the defeat of Zahakk
 3. Fire is the mark of Adar Burzin Meher
 4. The scroll symbolizes the 21 Nasks embodying the wisdom of the world
4. Give geographical and historical background to Zarathushtra's origins
5. Introduce the idea of the Gathas as the message of Prophet Zarathushtra and place them in the context of other scriptures in the Zoroastrian religion.

Activity for Students:

1. Act out the story of Zarathushtra's life
2. Write your own creative story about Zarathushtra as a teenager.
3. "If you lived in the time of Zarathushtra" - an interactive discussion
4. Portrait of Zarathushtra - sketch or draw/paint or on canvas
5. Create your own crossword puzzle
6. Color/ Label a map of Zarathushtra's world/ Persia
7. Making a Stain glass Zarathushtra (paper and cellophane)
8. Create a power point on Zarathushtra's teachings

Sources:

1. My First Zoroastrian Prayer Book - by Jamshed Rivetna
2. The Story of Our Religion - Zoroastrianism by Ava Mehta
3. Zarathushtra The Golden Star by Parveen Lalkaka
4. Zarathushtra - God's messenger from ancient Persia (www.amarchithrakatha.com)
5. Zoroastrianism by Jenny Rose

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/>

<https://www.iranicaonline.org/>

<https://www.britannica.com/>

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