



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Parsi 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**

Subject of the Lesson: Life and Legends of Zarathushtra

Background Knowledge for Teacher:

Who is Zarathushtra

Spitaman 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. Zarathushtra 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 the King Kai Vishtaspa was riding his horse, the horse 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:

Spitaman 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. Detailed study of Zarathushtra's life with a focus on his search for identity, who he was, and what his purpose in life was. Connect this to students' own identity exploration. Three questions can guide this discussion. Ask students to respond to the following:

Who are you? ----- Who do you want to be? ----- How will you get there?

Connect the responses to Zarathushtra's story of seeking truth and wisdom as a young adult and the ultimate revelation he received. Themes of persistence, open-mindedness, and actively seeking resources/knowledge to get where they want to be, will be critical to their success in life, just as it was for Zarathushtra's mission.

2. Show students a picture of the "School of Athens" from the Vatican. Ask them why they think that Zarathushtra was placed in this picture with the most genius and influential philosophers and scientists the world has ever seen? What does this tell us about how influential his message has been globally? What does this tell us about his message in the Gathas – that they are not prescriptive but are a philosophical code of conduct for us to live our lives by. Introduce the idea of the Gathas as the message of Prophet Zarathushtra and highlight themes that are particularly powerful in helping us live a life of curiosity (questioning using Vohu Manah), righteousness (path of Asha), and community (Good thoughts, words, & deed).

3. Give geographical and historical background to Zarathushtra's origins and connect these to modern day geography.

4. Discuss – Why do you think Zarathustra's messages as compiled in the Gathas are still relevant today? Make students aware of some of the contemporary scholars of our religion from Universities in London, U.S., Canada etc. and ask them why they think one of the oldest religions in the world with a miniscule population commands such respect and curiosity. What specific message from Zarathushtra resonates with them?

Activity for Students:

1. Write your own story of Zarathushtra
2. Research Project: "In search of my Prophet Zarathushtra"
3. Utilize resources on the internet and the library to research the life of Zarathushtra, what we know about Zarathushtra, the historical and archeological sites that inform us about Zarathushtra's life.

Some suggestions:

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/zarathushtra/index.htm>

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/overview/index.htm#teachings>

<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zoroaster-index>

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

4. Portrait of Zarathushtra - sketch or draw/paint or on canvas
5. Study a map of ancient Iran/ Persia
6. Have students present in power point on Zarathushtra's life and 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
6. K.E. Edulji - <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/zarathushtra/index.htm>

Prepared by: Vehishta Kaikobad; Arnavaz Sethna, Tashan Mistree Byramji, Persis Driver

Edited by: Vehishta Kaikobad

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