



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Religion **Ceremony-Parsi** 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: Muktdad

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

The sixth Gahambar festival celebrates the creation of human beings and is dedicated to the fravashis (guardian spirit). It is known as the festival of Hamaspathmaedaya in Avestan, Fravardigan in Pahlavi and Muktdad in Gujarati. Muktdad comes from the word Mukti – meaning end.

The Muktdads are the days to remember the Fravashis (guardian spirit) of the departed loved ones. Muktdad days are interconnected with the Calendar and therefore an understanding of the calendar is beneficial.

There are ten (10) days of Muktdad prayers. The first 5 days of Muktdad start with the last 5 days of the last month of the Zoroastrian calendar which are Roj Astad, Asman, Zamyad, Mahrespand and Aneran of Mah Asfandarmad. The next 5 days are known as the Gatha days and include, Gathas Ahunavad, Ushtavad, Spentomad, Vohu Khshathra and Vahistoisht.

60-70 years ago Muktdad prayers were performed in each household with each family having their own table. Presently, it is mostly done within the Fire Temple with vases dedicated to individual departed family member. Families may choose to maintain traditions at home too.

A Muktdad table (generally marble or stone table) consists of:

- A silver or metal flower vase in memory of the deceased – this is the same vase that was prayed upon on the 3rd day after the funeral (*Uthamna*) and later used for the Muktdad prayers. This represents Khshathra Vairya, creation of the sky
- Flowers - Represents Ameretat, the creation of the plants
- Water - represents Haurvatat, the creation of the water
- Milk - represents Vohu Manah, the creation of the animals
- Divo - represents Asha Vahishta, the creation of the fire
- Afarganyu - represents Asha Vahishta, the creation of the fire
- Sukhar and Loban - fragrant offering to the fire
- Fruits - offering
- Food: Generally consists of the deceased's favorite food
- Siyav and Kusti - White piece of cloth with a kusti to symbolically offer the Fravashis garments/clothes
- Namgrahan - List of names of deceased family member



Before starting prayers, mop and clean the area where prayers are going to be held. Wash all the implements known as *Alat*.

Prayers recited by the priest during the Muktdad rituals include the Afrinagan, Farokhshi, Stum and Baj. Afrin in Avestan means *to invite*. Muktdad days start with *inviting* the fravashis of the departed loved ones. Visiting family members can pray “Stum no Kardo” for the departed ones of the family (prayer for the fravashis of the deceased).

If more than one priest is praying – one can pray Afrinagan and the other can pray Farokhshi. If only one priest prays, then he recites both.

The fravardin yasht (13.14) states, "in that house in which clean and pure water and vegetation is placed, the holy fravashis agree to move about." also, fakra 13 – (in part) states: we have deep reverence for the good, strong, beneficent fravashis of the faithful who come and go through the world.

In the Fravadin Yasht, the Fravashis ask:

“Who will praise us, who will worship us, who will sing hymns to us, who will propitiate us with the hand containing meat (gaomata) and garments (vastravata) with the highest praise? Of which of us will be praised by name, of which of you will the soul be worshiped, to whom will the gift be given who may have everlasting food forever” (Yst 13.50).

The *Muktad no Namaskar* - Humbandagi (communal prayer) recited at the end of the formal Muktdad prayers as a community.

On the eve of Navroz, an hour before dawn in Ushahin gāh, the priest prays all the prayers one more time to bid farewell to all the fravashis.

At the break of dawn, the priest prays in havan gah and performs the first machi of the year in an agiyary. The congregation wishes each other Navroz mubarak.

For further information refer to the provided file “How to Celebrate the Muktdad – Adults Zoroastrian Studies – August 2021.”

Suggested Material:

1. Muktdad Slide (Power Point Presentation) by Arnavaz Sethna

Vocabulary: Muktdad, Fravardigan, Fravadin Yasht, Fravashis, Hemaspathmaedaya, Gathas Ahunavad, Ushtavad, Spentomad, Vohu Khshathra, Vahistoisht, Namgrehan, Afrinagan, Farokhshi, Stum no Kardo, Baj, Muktdad no Namaskar.



Lesson for students:

1. Review the concept of Muktaḍ, preparation and significance (7 Amesha Spentas) of the Muktaḍ Table, and prayers (Homage to the Fravashis; List of Muktaḍ prayers).
2. Break students into groups to conduct research on the ideological and ritualistic practices on how diverse cultures around the globe celebrate the dead. Some celebrations to compare would be:
 - Zhongyuan, or the Festival of the Living Ghost (China)
 - Obon (Japanese Buddhist)
 - Chuseok (North & South Korea)
 - All Soul's Day (Catholic)
 - *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead (Mexico)
 - Thursday of the Dead (Middle East)
 - Pitru Paksha (India)

Discuss the following question: What is the **true purpose** of these practices to a culture and to the people indulging in these practices? Why is it important to continue these practices?

- Reflection, community support, comfort & closure, family history

Discuss and discover popular funerary objects and artefacts related to various cultures/ religions/ civilizations.

Activity for Students:

1. Review and research the Gathas and choose a verse/ chapter of your choice to explain to the class; Create a synopsis or slide presentation. This activity can be done in groups or individually.
2. Create a Family Tree for as far back as they can by conducting discussions with family members living near and far. Ask them to share one surprising or new piece of information they learned about their family membership.
3. Group prayer activity - use the Stum no kardo (or any Muktaḍ prayer) to do a group recitation with explanation
4. Visit religious places and talk to priests or community members about their practices related to celebrating the dead. Or invite individuals from different cultures to talk about their practices.



Source:

1. The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra by Erach Taraporewala
2. Gatha Ba-Maani by Prof. Ervad Manek F. Kanga: http://www.avesta.org/kanga/kanga_gathas.pdf
3. Teachings of Zarathushtra by T.R. Sethna
4. An Ethnic Perspective by Khojeste Mistree

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