



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

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

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

Subject of the Lesson: Prayers

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Prayers are our way of communicating with Ahura Mazda. Most of our prayers are written in our ancient language called Avestan. Some prayers are written in Pahlavi and Persian (Pazand). Reciting our prayers properly, with good pronunciations and devotion can create a special feeling or power. This power helps us fight Ahriman by producing more Good Thoughts, Words and Deeds.

Avesta is our collection of prayers and is the name used to refer to the oldest texts of the Zoroastrians. The two copies of the written Avesta in the Achaemenid times were partially destroyed after Alexander's invasion in 330BC and much of them were transmitted through the generations orally until the renewed efforts at consolidating these texts was undertaken by the Parthians and Sassanians. There are five parts to the Avesta.

1. The Yasna (which means 'act of worship'): includes the Gathas – The Hymns or Teachings of Prophet Zarathushtra
2. The Yashts – Hymns of Praise devoted to the veneration of the individual Yazatas – the 'angels' who help Ahura Mazda
3. The Visperad (which means 'All the Lords') honors the celestial beings presiding over material realm.
4. The Vendidad (which means 'The Law Against the Demons') contains religious laws on matters of sanitation, ritual purity, and atonements.
5. The Khordeh Avesta – (which means 'Minor Avesta'): includes the daily prayers we recite today. This includes (1) The five Gāhs : The prayers dedicated to each of the five watches of the day; (2) The five Nyaishnas : Litanies in honour of divine beings presiding over the sun, the light, the moon, the water, and the fire. (3) The shorter Yashts: Hormazd, Haftan, Ardibehesht, Khordad, Sarosh, Hom and Vanant. (4) The Afringāns: They contain invocatory prayers and blessings, dedicated to Ardā Fravash (Holy Fravashi), Dahmān (Piety), Gāhambār (seasonal festivals) Rapithwin (onset of spring and summer) and others.



Prayers in the Khordeh Avesta can be further categorized into 7 different types:

1. **Manthras** - Manthras are simple poems that have deep meaning. Manthras have the power to help us, but they need to be pronounced properly and repeated several times to invoke a meditative experience. Examples: Yatha Ahu Vairyo and Ashem Vohu
2. **Prayers to fight against evil** – These prayers remind us of our duty as a Zoroastrian to fight against evil from outside and inside us. Example: Beginning of kushti prayers - Kem na Mazda and Hormazd Khodae
3. **Prayers to affirm loyalty to the religion** – These prayers show what the religion teaches us, what we believe in as Zoroastrians and how we should live our lives. They remind us that we are Zoroastrians, we always speak the truth, we work for the good, we fight evil, we learn the difference between good and evil and we try to perfect ourselves. Examples: Jasa Me Avanghe Mazda (recited at the end of the Kushti prayers).
4. **Prayers to ask for blessings** - The Tandorosti prayer is recited for the good health of oneself or others. There are also four short prayers, the Ahmai Rascha, the Hazangaram, the Jasa Me Avanghe Mazda, and the Kerfeh Mazda, which are recited at the end of the longer prayers such as the Yashts and Nyaeshes. They ask for various kinds of blessings for the person who has recited the longer prayers.
5. **Rituals and Ceremonies** - These are groups of prayers which are recited in a particular way for a definite purpose. Examples:
 - Navjote Ceremony: To accept a child into the Zoroastrian religion.
 - Marriage Ceremony: To join a couple in marriage
 - Jashan Ceremony: To celebrate happy and sad occasions, by inviting the Fravashis of all good Zoroastrians to be with us and bless us and to help us lead our lives as true
 - Death Ceremony: To pray for the departed
6. **Gathas** – Songs of Zarathushtra teaching us about the principles of our religion
7. **Prayers to praise and show gratitude to Ahura Mazda, the Yazatas, & Amesha Spentas**
 - The Yashts: These are very long prayers. Example:
 - Ahura Mazda Yasht in praise of God
 - Khorshed Yasht in praise of sun-light
 - Haptan Yasht in praise of the Amesha-Spentas.
 - The Nyaeshes: These are shorter than the Yashts. Example: Atash Nyaesh in praise of fire.



- The 5 Gahs: These are prayers in praise of the five Beings in charge of the 5 different periods of the days.

Why do we pray in an ancient language?

1. They are the holy words of Prophet Zarathushtra himself, who received his message from Ahura Mazda.
2. They help us to keep our link and connection with our ancestors right back to Zarathushtra.
3. The ancient prayers are believed to create positive vibratory effects.

Note to teachers: The intonation of the way the prayers are recited that are believed to be effective. Simple prayers like Yatha Ahu Vairyo and Ashem Vohu can be chanted or sung to achieve the vibratory effect to help connect with the group. Examples of prayers being chanted: <https://ramiyarkaranjia.com/audio-prayers/>

How to perform your prayers in Zoroastrianism?

When we pray, we should take a bath/wash our hands and face to be clean and ready to talk to Ahura Mazda Himself. Some other principles to follow:

1. Zoroastrians cover their heads to show respect to Ahura Mazda. This is similar to most faiths.
2. Face the Fire/ Divo/ the light which represents Ahura Mazda; You can also face a picture of Prophet Zarathushtra
3. Stand and recite our prayers aloud/perform the Kusti Bastan ritual.
4. Appropriate attire should be worn when entering a place of worship

Suggested Material

1. Khordeh Avesta
2. Gathas
3. Topi
4. Children's books
5. Divo/ Afarganyu with Sukhar and Loban

Vocabulary:

Dadarji; Ahura Mazda; Khshnaothra Ahurae Mazdao; Ashem Vohu; Yatha Ahu Vairyo; Zarathushtra/Zarthosht Saheb/ Zarthoshti; Navjote; Sudreh; Kushti; Khordeh Avesta; Gathas; Yashts; Yasna; Topi; Divo; Afarganyu; Sukhar; Loban.



Lesson for students:

1. Meaningful discussions:

- the significance and relevance of prayers in everyday life. Have students read a scientific article on the beneficial effects of meditation on the brain. Connect the practice of praying to meditation that includes repetition, peaceful setting, and mindfulness.
- many Zoroastrians believe that the living by the basic tenets of “good thoughts, good words, and good deeds,” are enough to be a true Zoroastrian. If that is true, what is the purpose of prayers? Should we continue the tradition of learning to recite these prayers?
- Some Zoroastrians pray daily but do their prayers in English. What is lost, what is gained by doing so? Does it matter?

2. Discuss the NPR article on the Department of Education’s guidance on prayers in public schools. (<https://www.npr.org/2023/05/16/1176476800/the-department-of-education-updates-guidance-on-public-school-prayer>). Have a debate on the pros and cons of this topic.

3. Research the broad kinds of prayers and prayer-related practices in multiple faiths including indigenous groups. Compare and contrast different religious practices and specific prayers such as prayers of gratitude.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/prayer/Forms-of-prayer-in-the-religions-of-the-world>

<https://jesus.net/ways-of-prayer/>

4. Discuss the structural elements of the Avesta (5 parts, definitions of Yasna, Khordeh Avesta, Yashts, Visperad, Vendidad; 5 Gehs)

5. Review basic prayers with translations for newer students

(Ashem Vohu and Yatha Ahu Vairyo; Kem Na Mazda; Ahura Mazda Khodae; Jasa me Avanghe Mazda; Din no Kalmo; Sarosh Baj; Tandarosti)

<https://ramiyarkaranjia.com/navjote-prayers/>

http://www.avesta.org/ka/ka_part1.htm

6. Introduction to Yashts and Niyaeshs with meanings

<http://www.avesta.org/ka/niyayesh.htm>

<https://ramiyarkaranjia.com/yashts-2/>



7. Explanation of the Five Gehs (Havan, Rapithwan, Uziran, Aiwisuthrem, Ushahin)
<https://ramiyakaranjia.com/5-gehs-an-understanding/>
8. History of compilation of the Khordeh Avesta
<https://ramiyakaranjia.com/avesta/>
9. 101 Names of Ahura Mazda with meanings
<http://www.avesta.org/ka/101names.htm>
10. Relevance of Prayers in daily practice - (Why do we pray? Why do we pray in a different language? In which language is our prayer book?)

Activity for Students:

1. Create your own activity (like a crossword) or game using the prayers and their meaning, like Jeopardy (Jeopardy Template attached - e.g. “Oh Mazda protect us from all evil” and the answer would be “What is Kemna Mazda”)
2. Situational discussion: How would you perform the kushti ritual if for example, you broke your arm?
3. What prayer would you pray if you were faced with a challenging situation?

Source:

My First Zoroastrian Prayer Book - by Jamshed Rivetna
The Story of Our Religion - Zoroastrianism by Ava Mehta
Ethnic Perspective - by Khojeste P. Mistree
Khordeh Avesta - by T. R. Sethna
<https://ramiyakaranjia.com/audio-prayers/>
<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/>
<https://ramiyakaranjia.com/navjote-prayers/>
http://www.avesta.org/ka/ka_part1.htm
<http://www.avesta.org/ka/niyayesh.htm>
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<https://ramiyakaranjia.com/5-gehs-an-understanding/>
<https://ramiyakaranjia.com/avesta/>
<http://www.avesta.org/ka/101names.htm>

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