



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Iranian Religion/Ceremony 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):

Subject of the Lesson: Prime Principals of Life

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Meaning of Amesha Spenta and its place in the Gathas and Avesta:

Amesha Spenta is comprised of two words, Amesha meaning deathless and Spenta meaning furthering, strengthening, bounteous, holy, sacred (those who exert their powers to further the good creation).

The word Amesha Spenta has **not** been mentioned in the Gathas.

The first recorded occurrence of the expression, with the elements inverted, is in the ancient *Yasna Haptan̄hāiti* (Y. 39.3): "So then we worship the good beings, male and female, the Spənta Aməšas, ever-living, ever-benefiting, who hold by good purpose." In the Zoroastrian creed, the *Fravarānē*, the believer declares: "I profess myself a Mazdā-worshiper, a Zoroastrian, rejecting the *daēvas* . . . one who praises the Aməša Spəntas, 2

Zarathushtra uses some twenty abstract terms to prescribe the way of promoting mental and physical faculties of soul to achieve perfection and immortality. He calls them "the primal divine laws of life." They are described as "divine names" in Haptan̄ghaiti, the "Seven Sections" in the Gathic dialect. In the Farvardin Yasht, it is "the progressive thought-provoking message, the very spirit of God," which gives these abstracts "beautiful, active forms," and God the Creator is their "guardian and guide." The context of the Gathas shows them as divine emanations, which are sometimes poetically personified. They are the universal laws of nature, the natural way of living (AA Jafarey).

The concepts below are those more commonly mentioned in the Gathas.

Spenta Mainyu, the progressive mentality stands for the creative faculty of God. It creates, sustains, and promotes the creation. It leads to perfection and immortality (AA Jafarey). It is the bountiful or progressive spirit (DJ Irani).

Vohu manah, the good mind is the source of all that is good and wise. It was through his own good mind that Zarathushtra discovered, understood, and reached the Godhead. Good mind leads to refined speech, which, in turn, turns into noble actions. Zarathushtra's doctrine rests on three pillars--*Humata, Hūkhta, Hvarshata*--Good thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. Good mind helps one to



discriminate between good and bad. It defines the sources of happiness and sorrow. In fact, it is the bliss some call "heaven." (Jafarey) The Good Mind is the mental capacity to comprehend Asha and the instrument of moral cognition. (DJ Irani).

Asha Vahishta

Asha or *arta* is the old Indo-Iranian law of "truth, precision, righteousness" that governs the universe—sun, moon, earth, seasons, and all. It is precision and order in the universe that points to the Creator, Maintainer, and Promoter. It has been enacted to maintain the creation. It is the road to perfection. In human society, *asha* is the right thing, done at the right time and right place, and with the right means to obtain the right result. This promotes a society to perfection. It ensures justice for all. It safeguards the rights of every member of society. It provides every individual with what he or she has contributed to society. *Asha* in a society sees that neither the society nor any individual exploits any person. And, above all, *asha* gives freedom of thought, word, and deed to every member (AA Jafarey).

Asha Vahishta is the Highest (Best) Truth, also the Highest form of Righteousness. This Truth describes how the World ought to be in its ideal form. Consequently, the intention to actualize it is Righteous Intention, and action according to it the highest form of Righteousness (DJ Irani).

Khshathra Vairya

Khshathra- Good mind, precision and other principles create perfect order. Zarathushtra calls it *khshathra*. It means sovereignty, rule, settlement, and dwelling. It is the "desired," the "good," and the "chosen" government of the righteous, yet it belongs to God. It is the "ideal" order on the earth established by human beings who are wise, enlightened, experienced, sincere, and above all devoted to the promotion of the living world (AA Jafarey).

Khshathra-Vairya is the Ideal Dominion. It is the ideal social (and political) structure of the human world. In human terms, we may call it the ideal society. In theological terms, it is the Kingdom of Heaven (DJ Irani).

Âramaiti, serenity and tranquility, thrives under a good order. A tranquil order promotes health and happiness, and mind and body grow together evolving to *Haurvatat* (AA Jafarey). *Spenta Armaiti* is the Holy Attitude. Theologically, it is the attitude of Piety toward the Source of Being and the Ultimate Truth; Ethically, it is the attitude of Benevolence, a concern for the Good. It may be characterized a Right-mindedness (DJ Irani).

Haurvatât and Ameretat- *Haurvatat*, wholeness, perfection. Evolution to wholeness means continuity, and continuity stands for immortality--*ameretat*. Wholeness and immortality make human beings **godlike** and make them live in eternal bliss, the ultimate goal of the Zarathushtrian doctrine (AA Jafarey).



Haurvatat is the state of complete Well-being, physical and spiritual integrity. In its full form it is a state of perfection on earth. *Ameretat* is the state of Immortal Bliss. (DJ Irani).

Ushta is true happiness that radiates happiness to others without any discrimination, social or otherwise (AA Jaffarey).

Zarathushtra uses more principles among abstract qualities that could help mankind to make the world an ideal place to live in peace and harmony with every living being, and to achieve the divine eternity ordained by God (AA Jaffarey).

Lesson for students:

1. Goal: Have a basic understanding of some of the Amesha Spenta. The Gathas teaches us how to live a good life. It is important for students to understand the concepts more than the Avestan words. Concentrate on one or two of the Amesha Spenta per class.
 - a. Read them a story that concentrates on the Amesha Spenta you plan to cover.
 - b. When covering Khshathra, use Cyrus the Great as an example (refer to the Persian History lesson plan about Cyrus the Great) and discuss the qualities he practiced bringing good rule to the land.
 - i. How does this good rule affect the quality of people's lives?
 - c. Covering Haurvatat, the teacher can relate it to a person's physical and mental health.
 - i. Use examples to show when we take care of our body by eating well and exercising, practice Vohu Mana, Asha and gain Armaity we reach a state of wellbeing or Haurvatat.
 - EX: Two students have a test in biology. One of them leaves studying until the last minute and then decides to go to a movie the night before the test. The other one plans, studies, and goes to bed on time. The next day the student who was not ready has anxiety and is not in a good state of being because of the poor choices he/she made but the other student has a clear conscious and is in harmony, peace, and experiences Haurvatat.
 - d. Dariush the Great or Maneckji Limji Hataria are examples that can be used for Spenta Mainyu. They both used their progressive mentality to improve the country and the other Zoroastrians' lives in Iran during the late Qajar Era.

Activity for Students:

1. The lesson and activity can be combined.
 - a. For example, the teacher can explain Spenta Mainyu to the students. Then have the students break out into groups. Give each group a paragraph about the positive deeds



- of Dariush the Great and Manekji Hatara or a more contemporary individual who has been beneficial to the Zoroastrian or global community and have students write down which of their actions or way of thinking represents Spenta Mainyu.
- b. Another example would be for the teacher to explain Vohu Manah then present students with different difficult scenarios then have class discuss which option would they choose and why. How does it relate to using Vohu Manah?
 - i. Scenario example: Your friend has started cyber bullying a classmate. You have talked to her/him several times about the wrong path you think she/he is taking but there is no use. Your friend asks you to show your loyalty and your friendship by staying silent and not telling anyone. Do you tell his/her parents or school officials or choose to keep your friend's secret?

Sources:

1. www.zoroastrian.org
2. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/amesa-spenta-beneficent-divinity>
3. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/armaiti>
4. Understanding the Gathas. The Hymns of Zarathushtra by Dinshaw J. Irani

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