



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 Principles of Life

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

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

The word 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 Haptan̄hāiti, 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, Hûkhta, Hvarshta--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 *Hauvatat* (AA Jafarey). *Spenta Armaity* 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 as Right-mindedness (DJ Irani).



Haurvatat and Ameretat

Haurvatât, 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 Jafarey).

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 Spentan and have a general knowledge of the primal principles of life and their importance in Zarathushtra's teaching.
 - a. The Gathas teaches us how to live a good life. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra gives us a general, logical blueprint to use as guide. Below are some examples to guide the lesson. Use them as one approach to teach all Amesha Spentan. It is important for students to understand the concepts more than the Avestan words.
 - b. Vohu Mana and Asha
 - i. Our thoughts will transpire into words and actions. Our thoughts are non-tangible but once they get manifested into words and actions, we see the results and will have to face the consequences or enjoy the rewards of our choices. We can only have a happy and prosperous life if we use our good thoughts or good thinking to make decisions. Why? Goodness and fairness increase in the community, and everyone will benefit from this peace. Give student different scenarios and ask them what they would do in each situation and if they think it is a good decision and in line with a harmonious flow towards happiness of all (Asha) and why?
 1. Ex. While taking a biology test, your friend next to you gives you a sign that he wants you to share the answer to one of the questions. What do you do? What is the result or consequence of your decision?
 - c. Armaity- peace, serenity, devotion



- i. Feeling content and good about ourselves, our actions and decisions bring peace to mind and body, help us make wiser decisions and enjoy health. Use the same exercise as above to teach students about Armaity.
 1. Ex: Sam is using social media (Instagram and TikTok) to show that he is living a glamorous life when in reality he is only posing as such. He wants to seem cool and outgoing in his friend's eyes. His friends ask him about his postings, and he continuously has to pretend. On one hand it is nice that his friends regard him as an amazing individual but on the other hand he knows these are false accounts. How do you think he feels deep down? Do you think he can continue pretending? Why or why not? Relate this to making decisions to maintain Armaity in our lives.
- d. Spenta Mainyu- Progressive Mentality
 - i. Being righteous and truthful, and having a good mind is not enough. One important attribute of Ahura Mazda is progressive mentality. We need to always improve and move towards betterment of the world.
 1. Ex. Roya is a good student. One day, her teacher suggested for her to do an extra project to push herself to further by participating in a research project. Roya was not sure if she should accept the challenge. She had some extra time, but she already had an A in class and the extra project would not boost up her GPA. What should she do? How does it relate to the lesson on Spenta Mainyu?
 - e. Introduce the primal principles of life in the Gathas. How each one connects to the other. Why practicing them can be beneficial to humanity?

Activity for Students:

1. Break students into groups. Ask each group to come up with a scenario or a dilemma to fit the Amesha Spenta that you are teaching that day. Then have each group share their scenario with the class and as a class discuss the pros and cons of each decision relating it to the Amesha Spenta that you are teaching and its relation to personal and communal benefit.
2. Make a game out of the different scenarios. Print different short scenarios relating to the Amesha Spenta that you are teaching that day. Get a basket and a ball. Have one of the students read the scenario to class and have another student through a ball into the basket, the third student needs to give a good answer to the scenario by the time the second student makes the basket. Discuss with class if the answer was in alignment with the teachings of Zarathushtra relating to the Amesha Spenta.
3. Bring boards and have students make posters depicting that day's Amesha Spenta. For example, if you taught them about Armaity then they can draw or glue cut out photos that relate to peace, serenity, devotion. They can also write phrases that relate to Armaity such as



“do the right thing to have peace of mind”. The posters can be shared with other students at your center by displaying them during the following group gathering.

4. Print all the primal principles of life and put the class into teams and ask them to put them in the order of importance. How and why each one is necessary to achieve happiness (Ushta)?

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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