



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 a Right-mindedness (DJ Irani).

Haurvatat and Ameretat- *Haurvatât*, wholeness, perfection. Evolution to wholeness means continuity, and continuity stands for immortality--*Ameretât*. 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 the Amesha Spenta
 - a. The word Amesha Spenta is not mentioned in the Gatha but the attributes that make up Amesha Spenta are mentioned (Spenta Mainyu, Vohu Mana, Asha, Armaiti, Vohu Khshathra, Haurvatat, Amertat).
 - b. The word Spenta Amesha is first mentioned in Hantanghaiti which are part of Yasna, written about the same time as the Gathas by his followers.
 - c. Amesha Spenta are abstract faculties that help us lead a life of good conscious and happiness.
 - d. Teach the Amesha Spenta through an activity as described in #1 of activity section.
2. Goal: To understand each Amesha Spenta (this lesson can be broken down into several classes, each class concentrating on one or two of the Amesha Spenta)
 - a. Pick one or two of the Amesha Spenta that relate more closely to one another and form a discussion or activity.
 - i. Ex: Vohu Mana (Vohu means good in Avestan and Mana means mind). It is the correct and better way of thinking. As we think productively, positively, and in line with Truth then our words and actions will follow as such. It is our compass to distinguish between right and wrong. As Zoroastrians we should follow the path of Asha and live a life in tune with Righteousness and Truth. Vohu Mana is how we can recognize Asha (righteousness, Truth, order, what fits, doing the right thing at the right time with the right tools to get the right results). The teacher can follow with an activity. For an example look at #2 in activity section.



- ii. Ex: Vohu Khshathra means good rule or good dominion. We can look at this in two ways either as a leader of a country, community, or the leader of our own body and soul. You can discuss this by using #3 in the activity section.

Activity for Students:

1. Break the class into 2-3 groups depending on the number of students. Write each Amesha Spenta and their meaning on a separate piece of paper and make duplicates to match the number of groups formed. Ask each group to put the Amesha Spenta in the order they think is appropriate to reach the end goal of Ameretat. Then put the results of each group on the board and open a discussion between students as to why one attribute is placed before the other.
2. Give students different scenarios and open a discussion as how they would use their compass, Vohu Mana to act in tune with Asha. Ex: It is WWII Germany; you have given refuge to a family of Jews. The German soldiers are checking each house to make sure no one is giving refuge to a Jew. They knock on your door and ask you if you have a Jew in your house. What do you answer? If you say yes, the family is taken away and probably murdered. If you say no and get caught your family will be punished or killed.
3. Ask students to list what makes a country under good rule? Some answers could include safety of borders and communities, honesty and security in trade, improvement of the land to make it more prosperous, fairness and care of leaders, peace, etc. Lead the discussion to get to the conclusion that leaders and citizens exercising Vohu Mana, following Asha, which leads to Armaity (peace and love), and Spenta Mainyu or progressive mentality can each hand in hand lead to Vohu Khshathra or a land with good rule. The above can also be related to individual's mental and physical wellness meaning good rule of one's body and soul as the dominion of Vohu Khshathra. How can we be a good leader of our own wellbeing and exercise good rules of our body and soul? Some answers can be exercise regularly, eat healthy food, think well of one another, work to resolve some of our negative attitudes toward events or others, etc.
4. Bring a newspaper clipping or a video of a current event that relates to the day's lesson. After the day's lesson bring up the current event and have students discuss how the current event can be solved if we use the Amesha Spenta.

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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