FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): <mark>Iranian Religion</mark>/Ceremony   History   Prayer   Gathas
Comparative Religion   Shahnameh

Age Group (circle one): PreK-K   <mark>Grades 1-3</mark>   Grades 4-5   Grades 6-8   Grades 9-12

Lesson # (if applicable):

Subject of the Lesson: Saoshyant and Frashokereti

Background Knowledge for Teacher:

Goal: The goal of this lesson is to emphasize that each one of us needs to play a part in making this life excellent for all. Each one of us can be a Saoshyant or a benefactor.

Introduction:

The concept of Saoshyant (benefactor) and Frashokereti (making life excellent) has changed over time from what Zarathushtra presents in the Gathas to that of the later texts. It is important for students to understand the concepts as depicted in the Gathas. The high school students should also learn about the myths to increase their knowledge and understanding about the teachings of Zarathushtra and how it has changed form in later centuries.

Saoshyant:

Saoshyant in the Gathas:

Saoshyant in the Zoroastrian belief is a person who is the benefactor, helper or the one who makes this world a better place.

"Saoshyant" is derived from the Old Indian root word "su" meaning "to swell". In Old Indian the verb has a semantic range "to swell, be strong, increase, prosper." In Avestan corresponds *sūra-* (OInd. *śū́ra-*) "strong," *yawaēsū-* "ever thriving." The term in Zoroastrianism is sometimes rendered as "savior" (Bartholomae). This approximation of the meaning, in eschatological contexts only, has the disadvantage of associations with Christian theology. Since the term also occurs frequently in reference to contemporary individuals, including Zoroaster, a more neutral translation such as "benefactor" (e.g., Darmesteter; Humbach and Faiss) or "helper" (Lommel) may be preferred. However, there is a further semantic development, "to be of use, profit, advantage" (intransitive), and "to create profit, use, advantage, to further" (transitive). It is in this latter semantic range that the Zoroastrian tradition understood the meaning.[2]

In the Gathas, the word Saoshyant is used six times.

Ashu Zartosht for the first time introduces the word "Saoshyant" in the Gathas and announces himself to be one. (Refer to Gatha verses 34-13,45-11,48-12,53-2,46-3,48-9)

Ashu Zarthosht also names three of his close friends and followers "Saoshyant". These three are:

- Maidyumah (his cousin)
- King Goshtasp (the first king who became a follower of Ashu Zarthosht and helped him spread his teachings)
- Jamasp (his son-in law)

In the Gathas, the term Saoshyant has been presented as singular, plural, in present and future context. That is any person or persons who is a benefactor in the present, or the future is a Saoshyant (within the context of the meaning of the term, we can consider those benefactors who came before Zarathushtra as Saoshyant as well).

According to the teachings in the Gathas a person can reach the highest level of being by following the attributes of Ahura Mazda which are also known as the Amesha Spentas.

Ahura Mazda's attributes are:

1) Asha (righteousness)
2) Vohu Mana (good mind)
3) Khshathra (dominance of self)
4) Armaiti (love, faith, serenity)
5) Haurvatat (progression, completion)
6) Ameretat (immortality, becoming one with the Creator).
7) Spenta Mainyu (progressive mentality)

<u>Who is a Saoshyant?</u>

Any individual can become a "Saoshyant" by promoting and defending righteousness and improving the world.

According to Ashu Zarathushtra, a saoshyant is anyone who is:
1. Wise
2. Responsible and faithful
3. Courageous and opposes suffering.
4. Generous and promoter of kindness
5. Helps humanity.

Following the path of righteousness (Asha), the benefactor can set the world free from Druj (the cause of suffering through anger, greed, fear…) and bring peace and harmony.

What makes Zarathushtra's teachings modern and beautiful is that anyone can become a Saoshyant. This title does not necessarily belong to a superhero.

<u>Later Texts (Myths about Saoshyant):</u>
In the later Avestan texts due to our ancestors' hardships, we come across mythical heroes who were believed to appear in the future to rescue humanity at the time of turmoil or apocalypse. These stories and beliefs provided hope and a sense of security for its followers.

The stories in the Avesta state that:

- The first mythical savior appears 1000 years after Zarathushtra who will help with the spread of righteousness.
- The second mythical savior appears 1000 years after that who will promote the power of prayers.
- The third mythical savior appears 1000 years after the second one who will renew and improve the world.

According to Bundahishn (chapters 33,34), a text written in late Sassanid Era, more than two thousand years after Zarathusthra, the last savior and his helpers will bring in Frashegird (Frashegird is the Pahlavi word for Frashokereti in Avestan meaning "to make life excellent") with the resurrection of the dead and all will become immortal.

Frashokereti:

<u>In the Gathas:</u>

Ferashem kar (Yasna 30.9) meaning "to make (life) excellent". The Gathic adjective ferasha, functions as an attribute to ahu, "life"

> "and so may we be among those for you who will make this life excellent" (Yasna 30.9)

Yasna 30.9 indicates clearly that there is in the Gathas a concept of "making life frasha". This is achieved by "giving falsehood into the hand of truth" (Yasna 30.8) an idea which forms the central semantic component of frashokereti (Frashegird in Pahlavi) in the later tradition.

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra and his followers ("we" Yasna 30.9) bring about the renovation. Being Saoshyant, they fight and defeat Evil (Yasna 48.12). This indicates that falsehood can be defeated within one's own lifetime. It is their present life that they want to make excellent.

Therefore, in the Gathas, frashem kar is an act that defeats evil, brings renovation of life, and makes life excellent. This can be achieved by choosing righteousness and truth. The person who fights injustice, stands for truth, and Asha in short is a Saoshyant and brings about frashem kar.

Making life frasha or excellent is not the work of one person but all of us.

<u>Later Texts:</u>
In the later texts and later tradition frashokereti can be found in Zamyad Yasht (Yasht 19) with the arrival of each of the three Saoshyant.

It is clearly indicated what making life *fraša-* implies: it will become "ageless, without decay, not rotting, not putrefying, living forever, thriving forever, ruling at will" (*Yt.* 19.11.89). The dead will rise, revived by the one who does not decay, and life will be created anew in an excellent and perfect way. Falsehood will be driven out of the good creation, back to that place whence it had come for its destructive purpose (*Yt.* 19.12.90).[2]

The concept of a "savior" also exists in many religions. The followers of these faiths have been promised a hero who will emerge to rescue them and bring peace and unity to the world.

In the Zoroastrian belief we learn that each one of us can be the "Saoshyant" or the benefactor to make life excellent.

Lesson for students:

Goal: Anyone can be a beneficial person for the community and make lives better for all. Zarathushtra is such a person, and he mentions other people in the Gathas as Saoshyant meaning someone who brings goodness to others.

Below is an example:

1. Ask students if they know someone who organizes programs at their center without getting paid with the goal of making the center a better place for kids?
   a. If needed help them with some examples and mention why they are beneficial.
   b. Share with students some of the characteristics this person has that makes them a Saoshyant.
2. Ask them how they can contribute to their center and community.
   a. Be kind to one another.
   b. If someone is being mean to another classmate stand up for them
   c. If you see paper on the floor pick it up and throw it out

Activity:

1. Have some coloring sheets about courage, kindness, responsibility, etc. and have students pick one to color.
2. Have a weed picking activity to benefit the center's garden.
3. Have them say a kind word to the person next to them.

Note: This lesson can be implemented virtually by a short discussion as presented in the lesson for student section, followed by a story or a short YouTube film to enhance their understanding. Another option is to have them choose one of the characteristics of saoshyant and make a drawing. Give them 10 minutes then have each student share their drawing on Zoom with a short explanation of what they drew.

<u>**Alternate Lesson:**</u>

Objective:

By the end of the lesson, students will understand the concept of Saoshyant, recognize that anyone can be a beneficial person by doing good deeds, and will demonstrate their understanding by discussing ways they can be a Saoshyant in their daily lives.

Materials:

- Short, animated video or storybook illustrating the concept of Saoshyant (**to be sourced or created by the teacher or found online)**

- Digital whiteboard or shared screen for brainstorming.

- Virtual art tools (like online drawing apps) or paper and coloring materials if students have them at home.

Procedure:

1. **Introduction** (5 minutes):

   - Begin by asking students: "Have you ever helped someone or done something good for others?"

   - Allow a few students to share their experiences.

2. **Presentation** (10 minutes):

   - Play a short, animated video or read a storybook illustrating the concept of Saoshyant – a person who does good deeds and helps make the world a better place.

   - Discuss the video or story. Ask students: "What did the character in the story do to help others?"

3. **Discussion** (10 minutes):

   - Using a digital whiteboard or shared screen, brainstorm with students: "What are some ways we can be a Saoshyant in our daily lives?"

   - List down their answers. Examples might include helping a sibling, planting a tree, sharing toys, etc.

4. **Activity** (15 minutes):

   - Direct students to an online drawing app or have them use paper and coloring materials at home.

   - Ask students to draw a picture of themselves being a Saoshyant – doing a good deed.

   - Allow students to share their drawings and explain what they drew.

5. **Closure** (5 minutes):

   - Recap the lesson's main points.

   - Encourage students: "Remember, every one of us can be a Saoshyant by doing good deeds and helping others."

Assessment:

- Gauge students' understanding through their participation in the discussion and the content of their drawings.

Follow-Up/Extension Ideas: (optional)

- Have students keep a "Saoshyant Diary" for a week, noting down any good deeds they did each day.

- Organize a virtual "Saoshyant Day" where students share stories of how they were beneficial to others in their community.

Sources:

1. Amoozesh din Zarthoshti, pishrafte 2, Zoroastrian Assembly of Tehran 1399
2. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/saosyant
3. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/frasokrti

Prepared by: Nooshin Jahangiri and Artemis Javanshir
Alternate lesson prepared by: Nilufar Kamdar
Edited by: Nilufar Kamdar
Date: 8/2023