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   Grades 1-3   <mark>Grades 4-5</mark>   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)

Who is a Saoshyant?

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.

Later Texts (Myths about Saoshyant):

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:

In the Gathas:

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.

Later Texts:
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:

Use the "Background Knowledge for Teacher" to introduce the lesson. The goal of this lesson is to introduce the concept of Saoshyant to the students and that anyone can be a Saoshyant. Below is an example:

1. Ask students if they know anyone who puts effort and time into making their classes more enjoyable and their time with the other students valuable?
2. How is this important for our community?
3. How do their efforts change the student and parents experience at the center?
4. Introduce them to the concept of Saoshyant:
   a. Tell them that Zarathushtra also recalls and remembers the people who do good for the community in the Gathas.
      i. Give the three examples mentioned in the "Background Knowledge for Student."
      ii. Zarathushtra also praises the good men and women who in the future bring benefit to the community. He calls the people who are righteous, truthful and do good deeds Saoshyant.
      iii. Zarathushtra is a Saoshyant, and we too can be Saoshyant.
      iv. Talk to students about some or all characteristics in "Who is a Saoshyant" section and ask them why those characteristics are important.

Activity:

1. Make a word search for students to find the word saoshyant and the characteristics of a saoshyant.
2. Ask them to pick one or two of the characteristics of a saoshyant and make it a point to exercise those characteristics and share during the next class.

3. Break the class into teams and have the teams come up with a 2–3-minute play about one of the characteristics of a saoshyant.

Note: This lesson can be implemented virtually by a PowerPoint presentation, screen share the word search and have students mark it on the screen or email them a pdf to print out and whoever finds all the words first is the winner.
Alternate Lesson

Objective:

Students will understand the concept of Saoshyant and its significance in Zoroastrianism, and they'll relate this idea to modern everyday heroes in their lives.

Materials:

- Virtual whiteboard (like [Miro](https://miro.com/) or the whiteboard feature in Zoom)

- Drawing tool or app (basic drawing tools in Word/Google Docs)

Lesson Plan:

1. **Introduction** (10 minutes):

Begin with a simple question to engage the students: "Who is your hero and why?" Allow a few students to share their answers. This will naturally lead into the topic of what makes someone heroic.

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

Introduce the concept of Saoshyant. Break it down:

- Saoshyant means "benefactor" or someone who does good for others.

- In ancient beliefs, Saoshyant was seen as a savior or hero.

- Everyone has the potential to be a Saoshyant by doing good deeds and helping others.

3. **Relating to Personal Heroes** (10 minutes):

Ask the students to think about someone they know, perhaps in their community, who they believe embodies the qualities of a Saoshyant. It could be a teacher, a community worker, or even a peer. Discuss why they believe these individuals have Saoshyant-like qualities.

4. **Comic Strip Activity** (20 minutes):

Inform students they'll be creating a comic strip story about someone they consider is a modern-day Saoshyant in their eyes.

Steps:

a. If virtual, students can use basic drawing tools on their computers or tablets. If in-person, provide them with paper and coloring materials.

b. Ask them to draw a 4-panel comic strip.

c. Panel 1: Introduce the character and the setting.

d. Panel 2: Show a problem or challenge in the community.

e. Panel 3: Show how their Saoshyant helps or solves the problem.

f. Panel 4: The positive outcome of the Saoshyant's actions and the community's response.

5. **Share and Discuss** (10 minutes):

Allow students to share their comic strips. This can be done by holding them up to the camera, sharing their screen, or presenting them in person. Discuss the different qualities and actions they've portrayed in their comics.

6. **Conclusion** (5 minutes):

Reiterate the idea that anyone can be a Saoshyant by doing good deeds and helping others. Challenge them to think of one thing they can do in the next week to be like a Saoshyant in their own 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

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