



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: 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. *śūra-*) “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 Zartosht 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 Zartosht 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 Zarathushtra, the last savior and his helpers will bring in Frashgird (Frashgird 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 (Frashgird 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:

Lesson Objectives / Learning Targets:

1. By the end of the lesson, students will be able to define Saoshyant by identifying and describing the key attributes associated with the term, especially the roles of benefactorship, opposition to Druj, and the promotion of Asha.
 2. Students will analyze the impact of Saoshyant's actions, focusing specifically on the link to Frashokereti and the dominance of Asha, and will provide examples or scenarios demonstrating this connection.
 3. By the end of the lesson, students will differentiate between the portrayal of Saoshyant and Frashokereti in the Gathas and in subsequent texts, drawing attention to specific variations in interpretation and emphasis.
1. Saoshyant is anyone (one or more than one person) who is a benefactor, stands against Druj (deceit), and his/her actions increase Asha in the world.
 2. Saoshyant’s actions lead to an excellent life (Frashokereti), a life where Asha rules.
 3. There is a difference between the concept of Saoshyant and Frashokereti in the Gathas than in the later texts.



Essential Questions: Can one person lead the world toward Asha? How can each one of us make life a better place for all?

Materials Needed: Printout of the biography of some of the influential people.

Introduction / Anticipatory Set (5 minutes):

Ask students if they have ever heard of the terms saoshyant and frashokereti. If they have, ask them why being a Saoshyant is important and how can a Saoshyant lead the world to frashokereti. Can one person be so influential to change the direction of the world?

Vocabulary: Saoshyant, frashokereti, druj, Asha, Bundahishn, Zamyad Yasht, Gatha, Old Avestan

Lesson Procedure:

- **Direct Instruction (10 minutes):**

Use the material in “Background Information for Teacher” to introduce students to the concept of saoshyant and frashokereti as taught in the Gathas.

- Emphasize that Saoshyant is a benefactor who leads the world toward Asha. Each one of us can be a Saoshyant.
- Discuss frashokereti as the result of saoshyants’ actions.

- **Guided Practice (15 minutes):**

Introduce students to the concept of Saoshyant and frashokereti in the later texts.

- Have students discuss the difference between the two. Which makes more sense?
- How the later concept of saoshyant and frashokereti compare to the concept of the savior in other religions such as Christianity (Jesus saves mankind from sin by sacrificing himself on the cross) and Shia Islam (Mehdi the savior who will come to save mankind at the end of the world).
 - Some religions believe that there is a designated person who comes to the rescue of humanity when the world is in chaos and turmoil. Compare this ideology with ours which states everybody is responsible for
 - their own actions
 - the betterment of this world
 - being a benefactor or savior.

- **Independent Practice (10 minutes):**

- Influential People
 - Break students into teams or have them work independently. Give them biographical summary printout of some of the influential people such as Ashu Zarathushtra, Maneckji Hataria, Mother Theresa, ... who by applying the right methodology played a crucial role in changing the world for the better.



- Have students think about and later share about these individuals' special characteristics, similarities and motives which were essential for their role as a Saoshyant.
 - Ask students if they see themselves to be a Saoshyant. In the Gatha's a Saoshyant is a person who is wise, kind, composed, ...
- **Summary/Closing Activity (5 minutes):**
Ask students if they see themselves to be a Saoshyant. In the Gathas a Saoshyant is a person who is wise, kind, composed, ...
 - **Learning Extensions:** Students can exercise a beneficial act. For example make a flyer to share in FEZANA Journal, the FEZANA newsletter, or ZYNA (Zoroastrian Youth of North America) to bring awareness about a social issue or communal belief that needs to be remedied.
 - **Assessment:** Participation in class discussions, quality of research and presentation, reflection.

Post Lesson / Teacher Reflection: Reflect on the effectiveness of the lesson, student participation, and whether the objectives were met.

Note: This lesson can be implemented virtually by a PowerPoint presentation of the basic information, breakout room grouping option, and the use of the whiteboard on Zoom.

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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