



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): 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:

What are the Gathas?

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

What are the Gathas?

The Gathas are hymns composed by Ashavan Zarathushtra Spitama. They have 241 stanzas in all, a total of fewer than 6,000 words. They consist of seventeen songs, called Haitis, meaning “sections”. This is what Zarathushtra wanted to leave for his present and future companions -- a thought-provoking message.

- The Gathas are the hymns composed by Zarathushtra.
- Zarathushtra called his songs Manthras (meaning thought provoking words) and his doctrine Daena Vanguhi (meaning Good Conscience).
- The Gathas are not prescriptive. They guide us to use our intellect and good faculties in making better decisions, hence they are ancient yet modern in concept and applicable in today’s world.
- The verses are composed in the metrical forms of ancient Indo-Iranian religious poetry.
- The Gathas are intermingled in the Yasna or the Avestan Yasnas.
- Linguistically, the Gathas are the oldest section of the Avesta. The language is Old Avestan or Gathic.
- During the Sassanid Dynasty, a form of script called Din Dabireh was created to write the Gathas with precise phonics.
- In 1858-60 Martin Haug, published the translation of the Gathas in two volumes separating the Gathas from the rest of the Avesta. It represents the first Western scholarly translation of these difficult hymns. His lasting contributions to Iranian studies include, furthermore, the discovery that the language of the Gathas is different from that of the rest of the Avesta and that only the Gathas were composed by Zarathuštra. Haug’s impact on the interpretation of Zoroastrian doctrine was considerable, especially among Parsis bewildered by the Christian campaigning of the Scottish missionary John Wilson. In his lectures in Bombay, Haug argued that Zarathushtra taught a pure, ethical monotheism and a philosophical dualism, that there was no evidence for



rituals in the Gathas, and that the prophet's teachings were corrupted by later generations (Boyce, 1979, pp. 202 f.; Hinnells, 1983, p. 111).⁴

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	17	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72

The table above illustrates 72 chapters of the Yasna. Avesta is a collection of about 5 books, one of which is called Yasna. The highlighted numbers are the Yasna chapters that contain the Gathas (28-34,43-51, and 52). The different highlights show each of the 5 sections of the Gathas (please see below for further description).

- The songs are divided into 5 sections depending on their poetic meter and each section is named with the first word of the section. For example, the first word in Yasna 43 which starts Ushtavaiti Gatha is Ushta.
 - **Ahunavaiti Gatha- 7 chapters** (Y28, Y29, Y30, Y31, Y32, Y33, Y34)
 - **Ushtavaiti Gatha- 4 chapters** (Y43, Y44, Y45, Y46)
 - **Spentamainyush Gatha- 4 chapters** (Y47, Y48, Y49, Y50)
 - **Vohukhshathra Gatha- 1 chapter** (Y51)
 - **Vahishtoishti Gatha- 1 chapter** (Y53)

Lesson for students:

Learning objective: To provide a basic introduction to the Gathas, and its composition.

Essential Question:

1. What are the Gathas?
2. Who composed them?
3. Why is it important to Zoroastrians?

Materials Needed:

1. White board
2. Activity sheet #2



Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

Every religion has a book that the followers of that religion consider sacred because it contains guidance as to how to live according to that religion. Many of these sacred books were written many years after the death of the religion's prophet and by other individuals. We are lucky that our sacred book contains our prophet's own words as sung and composed by him more than 3500 years ago. This book that guides us Zoroastrians is called the Gathas.

Vocabulary: Gathas, prophet, Zarathushtra

Lesson Procedure:

Direct Instruction (15 minutes):

Use the "Background Knowledge for the Teacher" to present the lesson. The concentration should be on the following:

- The Gathas are Zarathushtra's message.
- Zarathushtra Spitama is the prophet or the messenger of the Zoroastrian religion. Zarathushtra was his first name and Spitama his family name.
- Ashavan or Ashu means one who is righteous. Many times, we give Zarathushtra the title of Ashu Zarathushtra or Ashavan Zarathushtra.
- The message is a guide for a good life.
- The Gathas has 17 songs in the form of poetry.
- Zarathushtra called his songs Manthras meaning songs that stimulate us to think and make good decisions.
- Zarathushtra called Zoroastrian religion Daena Vanguhi meaning good conscience. Good conscience means feeling good about our decisions and knowing that they were made with good thoughts.

Virtual class: Use PowerPoint or whiteboard to present the lesson.

Guided Instruction (5-10 minutes):

- Bring each student a Gatha book to use or bring in a few Gatha books and break students into groups to share the book.
- Ask students to open the book and in turn share with class their thoughts or something they see that catches their attention and use their answers to further the educational opportunity.

Virtual Class: Show students a Gatha book on Zoom using the camera and then through screen share. Share the verse for discussion on screen.



Independent Practice (10-15 minutes)

- Give students a sheet of paper and ask them to write down everything they remember from the lesson. Have them share their statements with the class.

Virtual Class:

- Use the Zoom whiteboard and ask each student to share something they remember from the lesson and write it on the whiteboard.

Summary (10-15 minutes)

- Make questions from the lesson and break students into two teams. Ask each team a question in turn and give them points for each correct answer. The teacher can use the “direct instruction” bullets to guide their questions.

Virtual Class:

- Make a Kahoot game or use the “Virtual Ideas” from the “Teacher’s Guide” section of the FEZANA REC website to make up games to review the lesson.

Learning Extension:

- Encourage students to share what they learned with their parents.

Assessment:

- Assess the students’ understanding of the lesson and their interest and involvement in the activity. Ask students the questions in the “essential question” section to evaluate the students’ understanding through their responses.

Sources:

1. www.Zoroastrian.org
2. www.avesta.org
3. Understanding the Gathas, The Hymns of Zarathushtra-By Dinshaw J. Irani
4. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/haug-martin>

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