



## 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).<sup>4</sup>

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 know the basic teachings of Zarathushtra in the Gathas and how it is sectioned.

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 #1



### 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. Today we will learn where is the Gathas in the Avesta and how is it sectioned.

Vocabulary: Gathas, prophet, Zarathushtra, Yasna

### **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.
- 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.
- Avesta is made up of about 5 books. One of which is the Yasna. Yasna is made of 72 chapters, 17 of which are the Gathas.
- Tell students which of the Yasna chapters are the Gathas-
  - Note: The Gatha chapters are not in sequence within the Yasna.
- The Gathas is composed in the language of Zarathushtra called Old Avestan or Gathic which today is translated into English, Persian, and other languages.
  - Din Dabireh alphabet is used to write the Gathas with precise phonics.
- Today, the Gathas are available in one book.

Virtual class you can present the material by PowerPoint.

#### Guided Instruction (5-10 minutes):

- Bring in a few Gatha books that include the Avestan script and the English translation to share with students. Have students look at them and asks to promote further educational opportunities.



Virtual Class: Show students a Gatha book that includes the Avestan script and the English translation on Zoom using the camera and then through screen. Encourage students to share what they notice about the book and ask questions to promote further educational opportunities.

Independent Practice (15-20 minutes)

- Have students complete the activity 1 worksheet, first page only to color the Gatha chapters within the Yasna.
  - Share with class.
- Use activity 2 sheet and have students try writing their names in Din Dabireh. Share with class.

Virtual Class: Email students the first page of the Activity 1 worksheet and have them mark the Gatha chapter in the Yasna and share. Then screen share activity 2 sheet and have students use it to write their names in Din Dabireh. Have them hold up their work to share with class.

Summary (5 minutes)

- Ask each student to share something they learned from the lesson.
  - Add any information from the lesson that the students did not share.
- Make a game to review the lesson. Use the “Teachers Guide” section of the FEZANA REC website for activity ideas.

Learning Extension:

- Ask 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. Partner students in teams of two and ask them to take turns answering the questions presented in the “Essential Question” section. Then have them share their answers with the class.

**Sources:**

1. [www.Zoroastrian.org](http://www.Zoroastrian.org)
2. [www.avesta.org](http://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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