



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 goal: To get a clear understanding of the place of the Gathas within the Yasna, its language, division into 5 sections, names of each of the 5 divisions and why they have been divided as such.

Essential Question:

1. What are the Gathas?
2. Why is it important to Zoroastrians?
3. What is its language? Can we understand it?
4. Who recognized the Gathas within the Avesta?

Materials Needed:

1. White board
2. Activity sheet 1 and 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.

For many years, the Gathas were not understood but sung in the Old Avestan language. Today we have different translations of the Gathas, all with the same core message.

Vocabulary: Gathas, prophet, Zarathushtra, Yasna, Indo-Iranian, Old Avestan or Gathic, Daena Vanguhi, Manthras, Din Dabireh

Ashavan: One who lives with the laws of Asha.

Lesson Procedure:

Direct Instruction (10 minutes):

Use the "Background Knowledge for the Teacher" to present the lesson.
The lesson can be presented using PowerPoint.

Virtual class you can present the material by PowerPoint.

Guided Instruction (10 minutes):

- Bring in several Gatha books with both Avestan and English language included and ask students to study the book for a few minutes and share their findings.

EX:

The Yasna numbers are not in sequence.

Each Yasna has a different number of verses.

The Avestan words are difficult to pronounce and cannot be understood.

- Use what students notice to teach them more about the way the Gatha is written or compiled.

Virtual Class: A few days before the start of class, ask students to have a Gatha book handy during Zoom or show students a Gatha book on Zoom using the camera and then through screen share. Then follow the in-person "Guided Instruction" section above.

Independent Practice (10 minutes)

- Have students use activity worksheet 1 to complete as a group or individually.

Virtual Class: Email worksheet 1 to students to use during class or screen share it.



Summary (15 minutes)

- Do a Kahoot game to review the lesson.
- Make a game to review the lesson. Use “Activity Ideas” in the Teacher’s Guide section of the FEZANA REC website for ideas.
- Make a puzzle about the information presented and have students solve it as a group.
- Make the class into teams. Each team should say one fact they learned about today’s lesson. The team who can’t add a new fact loses.

Learning Extension:

- Do more research on the internet about the Gathas.

Assessment:

- Assess the students’ understanding of the lesson and their interest and involvement in the activity. Team up the students in groups of two and have them take turns answering the questions in the “Essential Question” section. Then ask each group one of the questions to share the answer with the class.

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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