



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:

What does it mean to be a Zoroastrian today?

Background Knowledge for Teacher:

Goal: Zoroastrianism is an ancient doctrine that is as modern today as it was 3800 years ago. It is a practical way of thinking and living practiced daily by a Zoroastrian.

Preserving and practicing Zoroastrian living:

What do we mean when we call ourselves a Zoroastrian and what qualities does a Zoroastrian have?

When we say that we are a Zoroastrian, it means that we follow a set of beliefs, thoughts, ethics, and morals that together make the Zoroastrian culture and religion. Zoroastrian culture is a moral and universal heritage, and its preservation and utilization are on our shoulders. For example, it is every Zoroastrians' responsibility to preserve the religion and culture just as it is every global citizen's responsibility to preserve our Earth. Our Earth is unique and vital to every human just as Zoroastrian history, religion and culture is vital to every Zoroastrian's identity. In Iran, Persepolis, the palace of Achaemenid kings who were Zoroastrian rulers is considered a universal cultural, and historical heritage however, preservation and correct usage of its resources are on the shoulders of Iranian people and the native people of the area. Zoroastrian culture is also a treasured heritage, and we must understand, preserve, and use it in our daily lives.

Zoroastrian culture is not a historical object to be placed in a museum to look at, it is a style of living with a different outlook on life. This style of living is both ancient and noble with its roots in a brilliant past and yet modern, innovative and in tune with today's global reality.

Zoroastrian living:

Being a Zoroastrian is not just a heritage from our parents or forefathers. It is a useful and practical tool for today's living and future. Zoroastrian religion and culture has certain properties and traits accepted by us as a style of practical and useful living.

1. Universal and inclusive

Zoroastrian culture originated from Iran and is native to Iran. It is in harmony with its ancient past, specially when ruled by benevolent leaders such as Cyrus (Kurosh) and Darius (Dariush). Zoroastrian culture indicates a lifestyle and community that was built upon Zarathushtra's teachings, some of this heritage continues to be part of Iranian culture. Although it is dear and familiar to Iran's native people, it is not limited to any race, people, language, or geographic location.

In Yasna 46 Verse 12 we read that in a time when there were limited communicational tools, Ashu Zarathushtra speaks of a noble from Turan (land mostly believed to have located Northeast of Iran) accepting his teachings.

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra is steadfast against discrimination indicating his criteria and standard for assessing a person's caliber is through that person's adherence to a collective set of beliefs, ethical and moral values that manifests in that person's words and deeds such as truthfulness, working to improve the community, being honest, etc. In other words, one's actions, principles, and beliefs signify one being a Zoroastrian versus a non-Zoroastrian.

2. Based on ethical values

The universal and eternal ethical values of good thoughts, good words and good deeds is the basis of Zarathushtra's teachings. Doing our action according to what is true, right, and beneficial to all are timeless ethical Zoroastrian values.

3. In tune with today's world

Zoroastrian religion is one the oldest monotheistic religions, however, its dynamic and flexible nature allows it to be in harmony with today's changing rules and norms. We can name the Human Bill of Rights as an example. The Human Bill of Rights is a product of modern society and of current global importance, however, the same core rights are in the Gathas composed by Zarathushtra about 3800 years ago. There is no conflict between the Human Bill of Rights and the teachings of Zarathushtra.

Link of Human Bill of Rights: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

4. In harmony with current scientific thinking of improving lives and further discovering the laws of the natural world

Zarathushtra's teachings and Zoroastrian religion, concentrate and strive towards improving individual and communal ethics and enhancing the value of life. This religion leaves the door open for innovative scientific opinions and theories in areas such as biology, medicine, engineering, etc. Technology and sciences are changing daily to improve lives and Zarathushtra's teaching is based on progression towards global happiness, hence it is in tune with beneficial discoveries and sciences. Yasna 48.5 (Song 13.5) says,



“...Giving health and happiness in life is best for a man who works for the living world in order to increase its splendor.”

For example, some individuals adhering to their religious beliefs refuse blood transfusion or vaccines. In the Gathas there are no such dos and don'ts. Zarathushtra teaches us to listen to knowledgeable people and think about their words with an open mind and then make our decision. This coupled with emphasis on improving the living world as part of our duty leaves the door open for accepting, practicing, and advancing scientific discoveries and ethical values.

5. Equality of gender

Women and men are equal with equal rights according to Zarathushtra's teachings. This right in all aspects of society is another valuable characteristic of Zoroastrianism in harmony with today's world.

6. Peace, serenity, and coexistence.

The Gathas do not encourage or advise in favor of conflict, warfare, or dominance over other people. The Gathas speak of conflict between better and worse ways of thinking. Zarathushtra invites his followers to only defend themselves and their beliefs.

7. Equality of human values and life

The Gathas do not consider anyone better than anyone else because of one's race, sex, ethnicity, etc. What gives a person value is that person's deeds, ethical and moral values, and conduct.

8. Respect of the arts

In Iranian and Zoroastrian culture beauty is praised and art which is the grandest form of beauty has special value. Art such as music, sculpture, painting, etc. were popular and widespread in ancient Iran.

a. Two examples of Zoroastrian artists:

- i. Vanecha Roudbaraki is a Zoroastrian artist living in France.

https://www.instagram.com/vanecha.roudbaraki_official/?hl=en

- ii. Fereydoun Ave living in Tehran and Europe

Take away from this lesson:

The important take away from the above is that all the values of Zoroastrianism manifest their merit only when we use them in our daily individual and communal lives and benefit from them in our practical living. Now the main question is how can we apply these values in our individual lives and what role can we play in their application of building a benevolent and productive society that continues to understand and preserve Zarathushtra's teachings?



Lesson for students:

Focus the lesson on the value of science and/or art in Zoroastrianism.

1. Ask students if science/art is important in our lives? Why?
 - a. How has science/art helped our lives?
 - i. Ask students to imagine traveling to their school or their friends' houses without having a car in the heat of the summer or snowy winter. Has the invention of the car or the plane helped us?
 - ii. Show them a painting and ask them how the painting makes them feel? Happy? Sad? Does it add value to their outlook?
2. Discuss the importance of science/art in Zoroastrianism. It is not a religion that concentrates on faith without question but one that encourages us to ask questions, discover and accept what makes sense according to our scientific findings.
 - a. You can share with students the scientific use of the qanats (source of water in deserts of Yazd), badger (natural way of cooling the air in Yazd), gardens in Persepolis (bringing water to the area and enjoying the beauty of nature close to our residence), the rock carvings at Persepolis (adds beauty and has a message of friendship and harmony).

Activity for Students:

1. Have students make a drawing of their choice and share with the class.
2. Bring materials to make a hand fan (or another useful object) in class and for the kids to take home.

Sources:

1. Amoozesh e din va farhang e Zartoshti – Grade 7
2. The Gathas Our Guide by AA Jafarey

Prepared by: Artemis Javanshir

Edited by: Hilda Kasravi and Nilufar Kamdar

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