



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 the 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:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson and present it to students.
2. Merge lesson and activity
 - a. Print all 8 points mentioned under “Zoroastrian living” in teacher’s section on a sheet of paper and make a few copies. Divide students into teams of two or three and give each team a copy of the 8 points and a simplified copy of Human Bill of Rights. Have each team highlight the areas of the Human Bill of Rights that are harmonious with Zarathushtra’s teachings.
 - b. Have the groups share their findings with the class.
 - c. Discuss ideas as to how we can implement and promote the 8 points in our individual and communal life.

Activity for Students:

1. Break students into groups and have each group do the following:
 - a. Select one of the 8 points mentioned in the “Zoroastrian Living” section and discuss/come up with ways as to how the point is applicable in today’s living. Then, decipher key value(s) from the selected point. (Ex: Zoroastrian Value point #5 emphasizes equality of gender, which promotes the value of being fair.) Remind students that the term “value” means “a person’s principles or standards of one’s behaviors” (dictionary.com)
 - b. Create a poster or an activity in which you promote the selected “Zoroastrian Living” point and the value(s). Ex: If “peace, serenity and coexistence” then one idea would be for them to make a banner promoting peaceful coexistence either as a global or an individual theme and display at their center to bring community awareness. OR if they choose “respect for the arts” then the class can plan and organize a day of arts when all the classes can join in playing a music instrument or display a work of art. This can also be done at a class level to be shared with other classes.)

Sources:

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

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