



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: Prime Principles of Life

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Meaning of Amesha Spenta and its place in the Gathas and Avesta:

The word Amesha Spenta is comprised of two words, Amesha meaning deathless and Spenta meaning furthering, strengthening, bounteous, holy, sacred (those who exert their powers to further the good creation).

The word Amesha Spenta has **not** been mentioned in the Gathas.

The first recorded occurrence of the expression, with the elements inverted, is in the ancient *Yasna Haptanhāiti* (Y. 39.3): "So then we worship the good beings, male and female, the Spənta Aməšas, ever-living, ever-benefiting, who hold by good purpose." In the Zoroastrian creed, the *Fravarānē*, the believer declares: "I profess myself a Mazdā-worshiper, a Zoroastrian, rejecting the *daēvas* . . . one who praises the Aməša Spəntas, 2

Zarathushtra uses some twenty abstract terms to prescribe the way of promoting mental and physical faculties of soul to achieve perfection and immortality. He calls them "the primal divine laws of life." They are described as "divine names" in Haptanghaiti, the "Seven Sections" in the Gathic dialect. In the Farvardin Yasht, it is "the progressive thought-provoking message, the very spirit of God," which gives these abstracts "beautiful, active forms," and God the Creator is their "guardian and guide." The context of the Gathas shows them as divine emanations, which are sometimes poetically personified. They are the universal laws of nature, the natural way of living (AA Jafarey).

The concepts below are those more commonly mentioned in the Gathas.

Spenta Mainyu, the progressive mentality stands for the creative faculty of God. It creates, sustains, and promotes the creation. It leads to perfection and immortality (AA Jafarey). It is the bountiful or progressive spirit (DJ Irani).

Vohu manah, the good mind is the source of all that is good and wise. It was through his own good mind that Zarathushtra discovered, understood, and reached the Godhead. Good mind leads to refined



speech, which, in turn, turns into noble actions. Zarathushtra's doctrine rests on three pillars--*Humata, Hûkhta, Hvarshta*--Good thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. Good mind helps one to discriminate between good and bad. It defines the sources of happiness and sorrow. In fact, it is the bliss some call "heaven." (Jafarey) The Good Mind is the mental capacity to comprehend Asha and the instrument of moral cognition. (DJ Irani).

Asha Vahishta

Asha or *arta* is the old Indo-Iranian law of "truth, precision, righteousness" that governs the universe--sun, moon, earth, seasons, and all. It is precision and order in the universe that points to the Creator, Maintainer, and Promoter. It has been enacted to maintain the creation. It is the road to perfection. In human society, *asha* is the right thing, done at the right time and right place, and with the right means to obtain the right result. This promotes society to perfection. It ensures justice for all. It safeguards the rights of every member of society. It provides every individual with what he or she has contributed to society. Asha in a society sees that neither the society nor any individual exploits any person. And, above all, *asha* gives freedom of thought, word, and deed to every member (AA Jafarey).

Asha Vahishta is the Highest (Best) Truth, also the Highest form of Righteousness. This Truth describes how the World ought to be in its ideal form. Consequently, the intention to actualize it is Righteous Intention, and action according to it the highest form of Righteousness (DJ Irani).

Khshathra Vairya

Khshathra--Good mind, precision and other principles create perfect order. Zarathushtra calls it *khshathra*. It means sovereignty, rule, settlement, and dwelling. It is the "desired," the "good," and the "chosen" government of the righteous, yet it belongs to God. It is the "ideal" order on the earth established by human beings who are wise, enlightened, experienced, sincere, and above all devoted to the promotion of the living world (AA Jafarey).

Khshathra-Vairya is the Ideal Dominion. It is the ideal social (and political) structure of the human world. In human terms, we may call it the ideal society. In theological terms, it is the Kingdom of Heaven (DJ Irani).

Âramaiti, serenity and tranquility, thrives under a good order. A tranquil order promotes health and happiness, and mind and body grow together evolving to *Hauvatat* (AA Jafarey). *Spenta Armaity* is the Holy Attitude. Theologically, it is the attitude of Piety toward the Source of Being and the Ultimate Truth; Ethically, it is the attitude of Benevolence, a concern for the Good. It may be characterized as Right-mindedness (DJ Irani).



Haurvatat and Ameretat

Haurvatât, wholeness, perfection. Evolution to wholeness means continuity, and continuity stands for immortality--*ameretat*. Wholeness and immortality make human beings **godlike** and make them live in eternal bliss, the ultimate goal of the Zarathushtrian doctrine (AA Jafarey).

Haurvatat is the state of complete Well-being, physical and spiritual integrity. In its full form it is a state of perfection on earth. *Ameretat* is the state of Immortal Bliss. (DJ Irani).

Ushta is true happiness that radiates happiness to others without any discrimination, social or otherwise (AA Jafarey).

Zarathushtra uses more principles among abstract qualities that could help mankind to make the world an ideal place to live in peace and harmony with every living being, and to achieve the divine eternity ordained by God (AA Jaffarey).

Lesson for students:

Goal: Have a basic understanding of some of the Amesha Spentas such as Vohu Mana (in the context of good thoughts- thinking with care and kindness about others) and Asha (in the context of doing the right thing and being truthful). Emphasize that we are responsible for our choices and our actions.

Use a story to teach them about using their good thoughts to do the right thing. If the character of the story makes a bad choice, then he/she should take responsibility for their decisions. It is important to realize one's mistake, accept the consequences, learn from it and not to repeat it.

EX1. Read the book: My Magical Choices by Becky Cummings

EX2. Come up with a story that takes place within a Zoroastrian family.

Activity for Students:

1. Have students write a nice phrase on a piece of paper. Then have them fold it and put it in a jar. Go around the class and have students pick up a piece of paper and read the phrase. How does reading the phrase make them feel? Happy (*Ushta*)?
2. Make a play out of the story that was read and have students perform it. If necessary, break them into two teams.
3. For a virtual class, present different scenarios and ask students what they would do in each scenario. What would be the consequences? Did they use their good thoughts to make the best decision?



Sources:

1. www.zoroastrian.org
2. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/amesa-spenta-beneficent-divinity>
3. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/armaiti>
4. Understanding the Gathas. The Hymns of Zarathushtra by Dinshaw J. Irani

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Date: 8/2023