



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?

Material 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 the 1800s Martin Haug, a German orientalist (one who studies Asian subjects or language), recognized that the language of the Gathas was different from the rest of the Avesta and only the Gathas was composed by Zarathushtra . He separated the Gathas from the Yasna prayers.



| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 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. The highlighted numbers are the 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)

The content of the Gathas:

- Some of the verses are addressed to the Divinity, Ahura Mazda, and other verses to the public that have come to hear the Prophet.
- Zarathushtra explains his teachings and encourages his audience to live a life as Ahura Mazda has directed.
- There are devotional verses addressed to Ahura Mazda, Asha, Vohu Mana and Armaity.
- There are verses which refer to episodes and crises in the mission of Zarathushtra.
- The main points and the theology of the message is present throughout the Gathas.

Main points in the Gathas:

1. There is one God, God of subtle Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, continuous creator, sustainer, and promoter of the cosmos (Songs 8 and 9).
2. Superstition and irrational ideas should be abandoned (Song 5)
3. Daena Vanghui (the Gathic name for Zarathustrian religion), the religion of Good Conscience, is universal and for all (Song 9.10, 17.1)
4. The divine enlightenment, Sraosha, reveals many divine faculties:



- i. Spenta Mainyu- progressive mentality, the divine faculty that creates, maintains, and promotes. 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.
 - ii. Asha Vahishta (Asha)- Best Order, Universal law, the highest form of Truth, and Righteousness. How the world ought to be in its ideal form.
 - iii. Vohu Manah-Good Mind, the wisdom behind every righteous move. The mental capacity to comprehend Asha.
 - iv. Khshathra Vairya- Desired Rule or Desired Dominion, the benevolent power that keeps good order in universe. It is the ideal social (and political) structure of the human world.
 - v. Armaiti- Serenity and tranquility required under good rule and to promote the cosmos
 - vi. Haurvatat- Wholeness and perfection. The state of complete well-being, physical and spiritual integrity-the state of perfection on earth.
 - vii. Ameretat- Immortality and eternity attained through wholeness- The state of Immortal Bliss.
5. The universe has been created good and is progressing toward completion (where Druj is no more, and Asha exists in totality) as intended by Ahura Mazda (Song 8 and 9).
 6. Humankind has been given the freedom of thought, words and deeds and has a bright mind to discern between what is good and bad for human society (Songs 3.2, 4.9, 11, and 12)
 7. Human beings have two mentalities, “spenta mainyu” progressive or bountiful mentality and “angra mainyu” regressive mentality. The wise would choose the better or progressive mentality. (Songs 3,4, 10). The objective of the righteous should be to win over the wrongful to the rightful way of being. Sooner or later humanity will correct itself and attain perfection and eternal life (Song 10.7).
 8. Mankind is its own savior (Song 3 and 10).
 9. Men and women are equal and enjoy the same rights. One person being more benevolent than another lies in righteous deeds alone (Songs 3.2, 17, 1.6, 5.3).
 10. Every person should acquire and promote wisdom. Free human society should select only fully qualified persons of righteous records and merits for both state and spiritual leadership (Song 2 and 16).
 11. The prime object of every person should be to make a better world in spirit and body. Human society must progress. Every member must persevere to promote it (Songs 3.9, 7.5, 11.9, 13.11). The Good Religion is a “self-renovating” religion (Songs 3.9,7.15, 11.19, 15.11).
 12. Enlightenment and happiness come to the person who gives happiness to others without any discrimination whatsoever (Song 8.1).
 13. Prayers help a person communicate with God and experience divine love. One may pray whenever, wherever and in whatever state one feels the urge to communicate with God. (This is repeated throughout the Gathas).



Note:

Understanding the Gathas Hymns of Zarathushtra by Dinshaw J. Irani can be obtained from ZAGNY as a good source in one easy to read booklet.

Lesson for students:

Learning goal: Understand the main teachings in the Gathas, where they can find it in the Avesta, and experience the practicality and modernity of the message.

1. Make a PP of the section of “Material for Teacher” to present to students.

Activity for Students:

1. Have a current event conflict (in form of newspaper or video) ready that relates to one or more of the main points in the Gathas.
 0. EX: The United States is experiencing loss of trees due to drought, fires, increase in harmful insects (for trees) and urban development. How much of this is due to the shift in Earth’s axis and how much of it is due to human irresponsible use of nature? How can we address this issue as a Zoroastrian?
2. Have the class watch or read the news. CNN10 offers a good source of material for the youth. Ask students how they think the news relates to the teachings of Zarathushtra? Break them into groups and have them discuss how they would use Zarathushtra’s teachings to solve the current event conflict? Share with class.
3. Many sources present Zoroastrianism as dualistic in ethics and morality. Ask students to search the meaning of dualistic on their phones. Then discuss if Zoroastrianism has a dualistic aspect in its beliefs. Why or why not?
 - a. Here are some sources:
 - i. <https://zagny.org/exploring-dualism-in-zoroastrianism/>
 - ii. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dualism>
4. Have copies of the verses of the Gathas as mentioned in “Main points in the Gatha” ready. Give each verse to one student and have them read the verse and decide what it teaches us about Zoroastrian belief. Have them write the verse and their conclusion on a sheet of paper. Then have them rotate the verse so that each now will have a different verse. Have them do the same. The two people who had a shared verse would form a group and exchange their ideas and form a conclusion to share with class.
5. Make a puzzle of the information in “What is Gatha?” section and have students solve it individually or as a team.



Sources:

1. www.Zoroastrian.org
2. www.avesta.org
3. Understanding the Gathas Hymns of Zarathushtra by Dinshaw J. Irani
4. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/haug-martin>

Prepared by: Mitra Dinyari, Artemis Javanshir, Fariba Pirghaibi, Mandana Pishdadi

Edited by: Hilda Kasravi

Date: 3/2022