



## 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):** 3

**Subject of the Lesson:** Zahhak

### **Background Knowledge for the Teacher:**

We now go to a land called Dashteh Savaran. There lived a king by the name of Merdas. Merdas was a kind, caring and generous king to his people. Merdas had a son by the name of Zahhak who spent most of his time in the saddle riding royal horses.

One day Eblis (Ahriman/ the devil) arrived in pretense of becoming a good friend with Zahhak, the young prince. Little by little, Zahhak started to believe, respect and honor anything that the Eblis (Ahriman) would tell him. The young prince gave an oath to Eblis (Ahriman) to listen to all his advice. Eblis (Ahriman) told Zahhak to kill his father, King Merdas, and become king himself. Zahhak said that he would not commit such a sin, but Eblis (Ahriman) persuaded him and told him that nobody can be a better king but Zahhak. In the palace, King Merdas had a garden. At the specific spot in the garden, King Merdas would say his prayer every night. Eblis (Ahriman) told Zahhak to dig a deep pit and cover it with straw. Night came along and King Merdas went to say his prayer in that specific spot in his garden, he fell into the pit and died. Zahhak became the King of Dashteh Savaran. Eblis (Ahriman) departed to further this scheme and to devise another strange deception.

### **Eblis Turns Cook**

Having tricked himself out as a smooth talker young man, Eblis (Ahriman) convinced Zahhak that he was an amazing, trained cook. Zahhak entrusted him with the key to the royal kitchens and gave him full oversight of all. In those days, flocks were not plentiful and living creatures were rarely killed for eating. Every day, Eblis (Ahriman) prepared many delicious foods that no one had ever eaten before. Foods such as egg yolk, chicken, lamb, seafood, veal enriched with saffron and rose water as well as old wine, etc. Zahhak was filled with admiration at the man's skill and said to him, "Consider what you would most desire and then ask me for it." The cook asked if he could be permitted to kiss Zahhak's shoulders. Zahhak granted his wish. As soon as Eblis (Ahriman) kissed Zahhak's shoulders, he vanished as if he never existed. From Zahhak's shoulders, two black snakes rose filling him with terror. They kept cutting them off, but just like branches sprouting anew from trees, those two black snakes grew again from his shoulders. Physicians advised King Zahhak what should be done but no remedy was found.



## **Eblis Turns Physician**

This time Eblis (Ahriman) turns himself into a physician. He said, “You must not cut them off; rather let food be prepared and given to them to eat so that they can be calmed and controlled. For food let them have nothing but human brains of two young men and it may be that given that kind of nurture they will die.” However, this was not true. It was Eblis’s (Ahriman’s) secret intent to empty the world of people.

## **Jamshid's Fortunes Declined throughout Iran**

People were so unhappy with Jamshid's kingdom. Turmoil erupted at every corner of the land and glorious bright days turned to darkness. New kings sprang up and sought ways to have power. They gathered armies and made war, their hearts were emptied of all affection for Jamshid, once their beloved king. People heard of Zahhak, the king with a dragon's body. In search of a new king, Iranian knights went along the roads towards the Arabs, turned to Zahhak and proclaimed him as a king of Iran. Zahhak journeyed to Iran where he assumed the crown. King Jamshid was killed by Zahhak.

The reign of Zahhak was a thousand years. In his time, Evil flourished openly, and truth hid itself. Each day, two young men would be killed so the royal cook would make foods out of their brains to be given to Zahhak’s snakes.

### **Lesson for students:**

Teachers should begin the lesson by asking students what they remember about the first story. If students do not remember anything, review some key points about it. The teacher will use the information in the “Background Knowledge for the Teacher” section to go over the next story in the Shahnameh. After reading the rest of the story to the students, the students can work on the activity listed below.

### **Activity for Students:**

After reading the story, the students can draw a picture of what they think Zahhak looks like.

### **Sources:**

- *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* retold by Elizabeth Laird  
*Shahnameh: The Epic of the Kings* by Abolqasem Ferdowsi (Translated by Reuben Levy)

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