



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): 7

Subject of the Lesson: Zahhak and Fereidun

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Fereidun prepared for war. He made a heavy mace shaped like the head of a cow and put on his armor and helmet. An army had formed around him. The warriors rode on horses with their baggage piled on the backs of elephants. They rode as fast as the wind, crossing deserts and rivers until they saw Zahhak's palace in front of them.

Full of courage and grasping his huge mace, Fereidun spurred his horse through the palace gates, beating down any demons that tried to stop him. "Zahhak!" he shouted. "Show yourself! Come out!"

But Zahhak was far away. He had invaded India and was rampaging through the land. With Zahhak away, Fereidun sat down on Zahhak's throne and put Zahhak's crown on his head and awaited his return.

Zahhak had a faithful servant named Kondrow. He was shocked to see Fereidun seated on his master's throne calling for food and wine. He took the fastest horse from Zahhak's stables and rode like the wind to India. When Zahhak heard what had happened, he howled with anger like a wolf. He gathered a great army of demon warriors and rode to take back his kingdom.

The people saw a cloud of dust rise up as Zahhak's army approached. They stood in ranks on the city walls, armed with bricks and stones, and hurled them down at Zahhak and his men. Fereidun and his army attacked and fought so bravely that the mountains echoed to their shouts and the earth trembled beneath their feet.

At last, Fereidun knocked down Zahhak with a fearful blow from his cow-head mace. He then sent him to live out his days, chained and alone in a far-off cave beneath Mount Demavand.

"Give thanks to God," Fereidun told the people, "For evil has been vanquished. Put down your weapons. You have no need of them now. I promise you that I will rule justly and show mercy to all."

When Faranak heard of her son's triumph, she bowed her head and praised God. Then she opened her family's treasure chests and secretly gave money to beggars and the poor and needy of the land.



Every year, Zoroastrians celebrate Mehregan to honor Kaveh the Blacksmith, King Fereidun and the people of Iran's victory over the evil Zahhak. Mehregan is the day of Mehr in the month of Mehr.

Fereidun's glorious reign lasted for 500 years. He split his vast empire into three parts. The lands of Rum in the west he gave to his first son, Salm, China and Turkestan in the east he gave to his second son, Tour, and the heartlands of Iran and Arabia he gave to his youngest and favorite son, Iraj.

Fereidun's sons quarreled bitterly over their inheritance, but none of them outlived their father. The glory of kingship was passed to Fereidun's great-grandson, Manuchehr, who would rule Iran for many years.

Lesson for students:

Teachers should begin the lesson by asking students what they remember about the previous 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 all the stories, the students can create a 5-question quiz. Students can work by themselves or in pairs to create their quiz. After they have created it, they can give it to another group and have them take the quiz.

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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