



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): Lesson 8

Subject of the Lesson: Seven Labors of Rostam or Haft Khan-e Rostam

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

The Seven Labors of Rostam or Haft Khan-e Rostam (Persian: هفت خوان رستم) are a series of acts carried out by the greatest of the Persian heroes, Rostam. In his labors, Rostam was often accompanied only by his horse, Rakhsh. In two of his labors, he was also accompanied by a champion, Olad. Rostam was from Zabolistan of (Khurasan-e Kabir) present eastern Iran to western Afghanistan.

Seven Labors of Rostam (The Haft Khan):

According to the traditional narrative, the story starts when King Kay Kāvus was the King of Iran. As a king, he is self-centered, selfish, and power hungry. One day a musician goes to King Kay Kavus' palace and sings about his native land, Mazandaran. In his song, everything about Mazandaran, nature and the way people live, is above and beyond anything that King Kay Kavus has ever heard before. Now he is so determined to explore Mazandaran. King Kay Kavus made so many bad decisions before that endangered his kingdom. His advisors are against his decision on Mazandaran but are unable to stop him. When his expedition to Mazandaran fails, the army is captured by the Divs. Rostam engages to liberate them. To do so, he needs to pass seven stages which are known as the seven labors of Rostam. The traditional order of the labors is:

First stage: Rostam goes to sleep among the reeds. In a short space, a fierce lion appears, and attacks his horse Rakhsh with violence; but Rakhsh very speedily with his teeth and heels tries to kill the lion. Rostam, awakened by the confusion, and seeing the dead lion and the wounded Rakhsh before him, heals his favorite companion. Then, he remounts Rakhsh, and proceeds on his journey towards Mazandaran.

Second stage: Rostam enters a desert, in which no water is to be found. Both horse and rider become oppressed with thirst and therefore, Rostam prays to God. Under the influence of a raging sun, Rostam sees a sheep pass by, which he hails as the harbinger of good. Rising and grasping his sword in his hand, he follows the animal, and comes to a fountain of water, where he devoutly returns thanks to God for the blessing which had preserved his existence.

Third stage: At midnight, a monstrous dragon serpent issues from the forest; Rakhsh retires towards his master, and neighs and beats the ground so furiously, that Rostam is awakened. Looking round on every side, however, he sees nothing as the dragon vanished, and he goes to sleep again. The



dragon again appears, and the faithful horse tries to rouse his sleeping master. Rostam again is awakened and is angry again; but at this moment sufficient light is providentially given for him to see the prodigious cause of alarm. Rostam succeeds in slaying the dragon.

Fourth stage: Rostem having resumed the saddle, continues his journey through an enchanted territory, and in the evening comes to a beautifully green spot, refreshed by flowing rivulets, where he finds, to his surprise, a ready roasted deer, and some bread and salt. He sits down near the enchanted provisions, which vanished at the sound of his voice, and presently a tambourine meets his eyes, and a flask of wine. Taking up the instrument, he plays upon it, and chants a ditty about his own wanderings, and the exploits which he most loves. The song happens to reach the ears of a sorceress, who, arrayed in all the charms of beauty, suddenly approaches him, and sits down by his side. The champion put up a prayer of gratitude for having been supplied with food and wine, and music, in the desert of Mazandaran, and not knowing that the enchantress was a demon in disguise, he places in her hands a cup of wine in the name of God; but at the mention of the Creator, the enchanted form is converted into a black fiend. Seeing this, Rostem throws his lasso, and secures the demon; and, drawing his sword, kills the demon.

Fifth stage: Rostam conquers the Mazandarani champion Olad, who describes the caves of the demons, and kills Arzhang Div, the demon chief in Mazandaran.

Sixth stage: Rostam enters the city of Mazandaran, and releases Kai Kavus, though still blind by the sorcery of the demons.

Seventh stage: Rostam overthrows and kills Div-e-Sepid, the White Demon. The blood of the White Demon's heart restores Kai Kavus's sight. Rostam also kills the magician king of Mazandaran (not to be confused with Mazandaran Province) and returns to Estakhr accompanied by the king (Shah).

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 the story, the students will create and perform a play about the Seven Labors of Rustam.



Sources:

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

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