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The Righteous Judge in the Seven Hurdles of Rustam

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Abstract

"The Seven Hurdles of Rustam" is amongst the most popular stories of The Book of Kings (Shahnameh), which has been abundantly discussed by scholars before. This study tends to analyze The Seven Hurdles from a different perspective, that is, the author has tried to examine and analyze the role of the righteous God , his presence and the way he helps out the Persian champion time and again. Next, the Tus wise man's affiliations with the holy Quran and Hadith will be discussed. As you'll read, God's presence in the seven hurdles of Rustam is undeniable, and he has been mentioned in the book several times by many different names such as: The Giver of all good, the righteous judge, Kayhan Khadiv, the Honest judge, The Matchless one, the Holy God, God of Kindness (God of Hoor) and the Prosperer. Therefore, Rustam's words and thoughts remind one of Quran verses such as: اَلیس اللهُ بکافٍ عبدَه (isn't Allah sufficient for His Servant) and من یتوکّل علی الله فهو حسبه (Allah is sufficient for the one who prays to him). Thus, Rustam's strong faith in God is evident throughout the story, such faith that is as hard and strong as his own body.

Key words: Ferdowsi, the Seven Hurdles, Rustam, God

Introduction

Ferdowsi begins his tremendous book in the name of god the Lord of soul and wisdom, which shows the special place of the universe's God in poet's mind.

Such viewpoint is evident throughout Shahnameh (The Book of Kings), in such way that each part of the book requires a separate study. One of the best books in this genre is called" In the Presence of the Creator of the Universe" written by my respected mentor " Majid Rastande" , who influenced me to choose the subject of this study,.

This paper tends to analyze the role of the righteous God in one of the most beautifully written and popular stories of Shahnameh (The Book of Kings) "The seven hurdles of Rustam".

The story begins when Persia's one and only national champion Rustam , goes to Mazandaran and passes seven hurdles in order to rescue Kau's (King of Persia) from the clutches of the white div (demon).

I would like to dedicate this paper "The Righteous Judge in the Seven Hurdles of Rustam" to my dear mentor "Majid Rastandeh" whose guidance and wisdom has always been helpful to me.

The First Hurdle: the Giver of All Good

In the first hurdle, Rustam spends the night in a meadow in which he encounters a lion. When the lion goes back to his niche there he encounters Rakhsh (Rustam's Horse) and bloody battle onsets between them. Eventually, Rakhsh the glorious and strong horse defeats and kills the lion.
Here, Rakhsh and the lion are protagonist and antagonist of the story and Rustam stands in the sidelines. That is why adoration of God and prayers are missing from this part. It is only at the end of this hurdle that Rustam adores the Lord and asks for his helping hand:

He rubbed down Rakhsh and saddled him, then prayed
To God, the Giver of all good, for aid. (Ferdowsi, vol.2 , 2009, p.80 , verse 307)

The Giver of all good is a beautiful name that Ferdowsi uses in order to describe the Lord, it is a Persian synonym for the Arabic name Mohsen. This name has been used in Shahnameh many times:

But by the power of God who's the "giver of good"
I shall not feel the heat of this mount of fire anymore (Ferdowsi, vol.2 ,p.35 verse 502)

Or

As the "Giver of good "has blessed us with strength

He'll bring us happy days and joys as well (Ferdowsi, vol.3 2009, p.194 verse 2968) (Rastandeh, 1999, p.59)

The Second Hurdle: The Righteous Judge, the Ruler of the World, King of the World (Kayhan Khadiv), the Honest Judge, the matchless one, the Just Judge

When the champion of elephantine strength reaches a waterless desert with intense heat, he becomes dizzy with thirst. At this moment when thirst has made him helpless he prays to God and asks for his help:

He looked up saying: "O all-righteous Judge!
Thou bring'st all toil and hardship on my head

And if Thou findest pleasure in my pains
My hoard is great indeed! I fare in hope

That God will grant deliverance to the Shah,
And that the Ruler of the world will free

The Iranians from the clutches of the Div,
Unscathed. They sinned, and Thou King of the World (Kayhan Khadiv) hast cast them out,
But still they are Thy slaves and worshippers." (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.80-81 Verses: 311-316)

Thus, the phrase "the all-righteous judge" should be noted in the first stanza, this is another name for the God, which refers to the justness of the Lord.

He said: "O righteous Judge! me Thou hast given
Grace, might, and wisdom (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.97 Verses 392)

In the fourth stanza, the phrase "Ruler of the World " (Kerdegaar) is used which means:" Creator of the universe, the world-lord, (Defenition quoted from Dehkhoda dictionary)

Ferdowsi has used this name for God several times, and this word is detectable throughout his verses and stanzas:

He said: O, the ruler of world

Keep us away from the hardships of the world (Ferdowsi, Vol.6, p.228 Verses 1005-1006)

The Persian , beautiful term " Kayhan Khadiv" has also been used by Ferdowsi , which means " King of the world, with Kayhan meaning the world and khadiv meaning the king , the Shah, this term is only used for God , thus it should not be used to describe anyone but the good Lord (Defenition Quoted from Dehkhoda Persian dictionary).

Most famously, the above name has been used by Ferdowsi to describe the lord in the story of Zahak , when Kaveh yells at Zahakis :

He roared: O Div's honest men

King of the World (Kayhan Khadiv) knows no fear (Ferdowsi, Vol.1, p.74 Verses 214)

Now the continuation of the story: After praying to the Lord, the great hero encounters a well fed ram, and instantly realizes that God has done him a favor, because he knows that the ram will lead him to water, thus he says:

In sooth Ruler of the world's mercy

Is truly extended to me! (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.81 Verses 321).

After he reaches a spring, he thanks the all-righteous judge again, and declares prayer a sign of wisdom.

Then Rustam looked toward heaven,
And said: "O honest Judge, that ever speakest sooth!

I pray to thee, the matchless one (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.81 Verses 325-326)

When hardships press on thee, in thy concern
Flee unto God, the Just One; they who turn
Away from Him have wisdom still to learn. (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.81 Verse 328)

The name "the Honest Judge" reminds us of the Quran verse: و مَن اصدقُ مِن اللهِ حديثاً(Nes'e , Women verse 87) which translates to :" And who is more honest than Allah?"

Finally, the name "the matchless one" refers to the fact that there is only one God with divine qualities.

The Third Hurdle

In the Third hurdle, the Persian hero encounters a dragon, so he fights and kills it in a bloody battle. When Rustam , stands upon the dragon's body , it is then that he realizes that no man could possibly escape the clutches of such huge monster. Therefore, he immediately thanks the Lord for helping him overcome it: :

The hero, astonished at the sight,
Invoked God's name (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.84 Verse 390)

However, the son of Rudabeh is well aware that he should stay humble despite his might and triumphs. Thus, he baths in the spring and starts to pray to his lord after his conquest:

He said: "O righteous Judge! me Thou hast given
Grace, might, and wisdom; what care I for lion,
Div, elephant, parched desert, and blue sea?
When I am wroth all foes are one to me." (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.84 Verse 392-394)

The Fourth Hurdle: the Giver of all Good, God of Kindness

Continuing with his journey, Rustam reaches a bright spring, surrounded by bowels of wine, different kinds of food and a lute. Rustam, who is a warrior and is not familiar with pleasures of this sort, gets uncomfortable and complains to the Lord for the hardships of his life,.

An old witch who is waiting nearby (as if waiting for Rustam's words of ungratefulness) turns herself to a beautiful young woman and goes to him.

When Rustam lays his eyes on this fraudulent beauty, thanks the Lord for sending him an angel.

The hero thanked the mighty God,

With never ending words of adoration (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.86 Verse 414)

The witch gives Rustam a cup of wine, before drinking the wine Rustam begins to thank the lord again, but as the name of God leaves his mouth, the witch turns into an old witch again. This reminds us of the Hadith:" الدّعاءُ سلاح المومن" (Prayer is the weapon of the faithful).

She handed him a cup of wine, invoking
The Giver of all good. Now when he named
The Lord of love her favour changed; no soul
Had she for gratitude, no tongue for praise,
But blackened at God's name, while Rustam, flinging
His lasso quicker than the wind, ensnared,
And questioned her: "What art thou? Speak and show (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.86 Verses 420-417)
Thy proper favor."
In the lasso's coils
There was a fetid hag all guile and wrinkle,
Calamitous. He clave her with his blade
And made the hearts of sorcerers afraid. (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.86 Verses 423-424)

Not only the ugly witch could utter the name of the Lord, she couldn't even tolerate hearing that holy name.

Rustam, on the other hand, thanks the lord both in times of happiness and in hopeless moments of his hardships and battles.

The mentioned events indicate two important points:

First of all, it shows Ferdowsi's Islamic viewpoints, because he constantly accentuates the important role of prayers.

According to legend, Allah's prophet once told his followers:" الا ادلّـكم على سلاحٍ يُنجيكم(Do you want me to show you a weapon that can save you from all your foes and increase your earnings?) They answered:"

Yes,", thus, the holy prophet said to them:" تدعون بالليل و النّهار فانّ سلاحَ المومنِ الدّعاءُ(Engage in prayers day and night, for there is no stronger weapon than the prayers of the faithful) (Sadouq, 2008 , p,59).

Also, the King of the faithful (Imam Ali) , has said :" الدّعاءُ تُرسُ المومن(Prayer shields the faithful). (Koleyni , Vol.4 , p. 214).

The second point is that prayers should be uttered even in times of comfort and happiness, and as we have seen in this hurdle, Rustam doesn't forget to show his appreciation to the Lord even in times of pleasure. As Imam Sadeq had said:" انّ الدّعاءَ فی الرّخاءِ یستخرجُ الحوائجَ فی البلاءِ(Prayers in times of comfort, alleviates the pain of troubled times) (Koleyni , Vol.4 , p. 225).

The Fifth Hurdle: The Prosperer God

In this hurdle, Rustam overcomes a warrior named Ulad , thus asks him the residence of the white div (demon). Ulad Warns the Persian hero and tries to discourage him from fighting the white Div (demon). But Rustam bursts into laughter and boats his might. The reason for his peace of mind and confidence is a supernatural power that protects him.

By help of God the Prosperer,

And fortune, arms, and prowess (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.90 Verses 505)

As we've mentioned, Rustam names different factors for his victory, but puts the hand of the Prosperer god above his own skilled arms, This is similar to Rumi's (Mowlana) story "The Lion and Nakhjiran " in the first volume of Mathnawi :"

Try to appreciate the gift of might

Don't try to deny that it is a gift from God

Thanking the lord for it increases your might

As denying it robs your from it in one night (Rumi,first vol, 2014, p.137, verses 942-943).

Finally, Rumi (Mowlana) continues:

If you tend to pray, do it every time, daily

Labor hard, and then count on the almighty (Rumi,first vol, 2014, p.137, verses 951)

The key of Rustam's conquest are undoubtedly, his deep faith and belief in God. He believes in the Prosperer God in such was that cannot fathom any obstacle. As Rumi (Mowlana) has said:" It is the faith of a man, that keeps his ship from sinking." (Rumi , 2010, p.83). It makes us proud that our national hero, has both physical strength and spiritual might,

Now, let's analyze the phrase "Prosperer":

The Prosperer or the bringer of Victory is a translation from the Arabic word Fatih, Ferdowsi has used this phrase numerous times:

Thank be upon the Prosperer God

Who has ended my days of sorrow with his might (Ferdowsi, Vol.4, p.188 Verses 1152) (Rastandeh , p.67).

The Sixth Hurdle: the Lord of the Sun (Hoor)

In this hurdle, Rustam rescues Ka'us who has lost his eyesight now. The great King of Iran then asks Rustam to fight the white div (Demon), for only his blood can cure his blindness.

King Ka'us utters the conditions for Rustam's victory:

Holy God may aid thee
In bringing to the dust these sorcerers' heads (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.91 Verses 546)

The Persian warrior accepts this challenge and prepares himself for the battle. First, he speaks to the people of Persia and hopes for the hand of God to help him overcome the div (Demon).

If the Lord of the Sun and my good star shall aid me
Our country and our throne will we restore, (Ferdowsi, Vol.2, p.93 Verses 560-561)

The lord of the Sun (hoor) has the same meaning as the God of kindness in the forth hurdle. It is worth mentioning that the word "hoor" means the sun in Persian language.

The God of all universes, ruler of all planets

Who bestows brightness to the moon and the stars with kindness (Ferdowsi, Vol.1, p.27 Verses 3)

The Seventh Hurdle

Ulad shows Rustam all the ways that leads to Div's (Demon's) place Him too, believes that only God can help Rustam overcome the white dive:

Know that you shall be victorious

Only if the Prosperer would lend you a hand (Ferdowsi, Vol2, p.94 Verses 570)

Rustam engages in an intense battle with the White Div (demon), Ferdowsi has described this epic battle with the most powerful and suitable words.

The wise Ferdowsi had named "divine intervention" as the reason for Rustam's victory.

The elephantine Rustam in God's strength
Strove mightily in anguish and revenge, (Ferdowsi, Vol2, p.95 Verses 595)

Finally, Rustam defeats the demon (div), and just like the time that he had defeated the dragon, washes his hands and feet and thanks the good Lord.

As He washed his body and

Found a pure place for prayer

He fell to the ground

" O all righteous judge

Thou, giventh shelter to all your servants

Thou, giventh me glory and wealth

Might, good heartedness and grace

As the sun and stars revolve around the earth

I felt only joy and pleasure in me chest

Still I am your worthless servant

By thy power a tiny particle shall become huge

And anything worthless shall become divine (Foroughi, 2000, p.179)

Thus, Rustam wins his final battle and offers his adorations and gratifications to the Lord. Just as recommended in Islamic teachings, he adores God for his for his matchless power and glory. This is recommended in Islam, in fact as Imam Ali points out:

"One shall only ask God for a favor, after he has offered his adoration to him; it is only then that you might ask him for a favor." (Meshkini Ardabili, p.401)

Also, according to the legend, someone asked Imam Baqer:ایّ الاعمالِ احبُّ الی الله تعالی؟! " What is the action that the Lord admires the most" His holiness answered:" Admiration from his servants, (Sadouq , p.31).

The customs of prayer has been accentuated in other great works of Persian literature. As the great Sa'di utters in the first verses of his famous odes:

First, let's start with the name of

The Great and capable Lord

The God of man and the whole wide world

Creator of inner and outer beauty (Sa'di , 2007, p. 359, 1st ode)

Again, in the first verses of his Persian Odes, he writes the following:

Thanks, gratitude and appreciation upon thee, our Lord

The God of man and angels both

Thou are aware of all secrets, thou watch thy skies

Generous to thy servants, guiding them always

Both worlds would testify to thy greatness

Matchless Lord, all the world looks upon thee (Sa'di , 2007, p. 647, 1st ode)

The wise poet Sana'ie has not only written his famous poem which starts with" My lord, I adore you for you are great and pure…..in adoration of God, but has written the following verses as well:

Oh Lord, I only know you as the "the Angel of Universe"

I won't utter no name but thy name on my lips

My eyes are accustomed to see thy greatness only

My tongue knows no words, but words of adoration for thee (Sa'naie , 2009, p.211)

Analyzing the prayer-style odes of Rumi (Mowlana), Nizami and Vahshi Bafghi are also recommended.

Conclusions

Therefore, since the Righteous Judge is with Rustam all through his hurdles, thus whether it was intentional or not, the great work of the wise poet of Tus reminds us of the following Quran verses:

Soorah Zomar , verse 36: أليس اللهُ بكافٍ عبدَه Isn't Allah sufficient for his servant?

Soorah Talaq , verse 3: و من يتوكّل على الله فهو حسبه: Allah is sufficient for the one who prays to him

Soorah Al Imran: verse: 173: حسبنا اللهُ و نعم الوكيلُ: Allah is sufficient for us , him who helps us with kindess.

Soorah Al Imran , verse 26: قل اللهمّ مالکَ الملکِ توتی الملکَ مَن تشاءُ و تنزعُ الملکَ ممّن تشاءُ و تُعزُّ مَن تشاءُ و تذلُّ من تشاء بیدک الخیر انّک علی کلّ شیءٍ قدیرٌ : Say O Allah, Owner of the sovereignty, you give the sovereignty to whom you will and you take the sovereignty from whom you will, and you exalt whom you will , and abase whom you will; surely you have power over all things.

These takes and thoughts on the story, helps us to understand Rustam and the root of his deep faith in the Lord. One might say that the great champion trained both his body and soul, thus he is not only a champion in terms of his physical strength, but is also an intellectual hero, in terms of his deep viewpoints, He stays humble, despite his numerous conquests and does not forget to offer his gratitude to the Righteous Judge for helping him overcome the enemies. Therefore, he constantly praises the Lord and prays to him. This aspect is undoubtedly what makes Rustam an immortal national hero in the hearts and minds of all the people of Persia (Iran).

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