An already ancient and often illustrated legend is that of Iskandar (Alexander the Great) and the quest for wisdom and immortality that led him to the ends of the earth. This illustration, which is compositionally complex, shows real towns on the horizon with their royal inscriptions, imperishable marks in the center and a clearing reached via a winding path located beyond the image, where an old, emaciated satyr with white hair is seated in front of his cave. A handsome tree with autumnal foliage leads the eye to the right, towards the town. Iskandar himself—most likely, a portrait of Huseyn Baghara, a great patron of the arts in late fifteenth-century Herat—has arrived there, accompanied by a torch bearer lighting his way, and five servants. It has taken Iskandar extraordinary efforts to find the sage. He sits down in front of him and hears that death awaits him. There is a striking contrast between the wilderness of the world, the tranquil space where the sage lives and the complex order of the town.
Queen Shmim had fallen in love with the sculptor Farhad who was prepared to remodel the whole of nature in order to find her, by creating her favorite space. However, King Khosrow learned of this and sent word to Farhad that Shmim was dead. Surrounded by his tools, Farhad then commits suicide, to the great astonishment of a traveler chancing by. Suicide is rare in epic and lyric tales and that of Farhad is no more than a tragic episode in the romantic epic of Khosrow and Shmim. The image is remarkable for its use of tone, blue, the color of mourning, dominates the clothing, the rocks and the ground. The dead tree on the upper left serves to confirm the drama that has just taken place.
Women bathing
Page from the Khamsa of "Gul Nach" by Nizami (c. 1141-1207)
2404-2405, (Women, Afghano-Persian)
Painting attributed to Behzad (1480-1535)
London, British Library, Or. 6801, fols. 190

Among the tales told to King Bahram Gur by one of the princesses who visits him, one about a prince on his way to one of his palaces. From the window of a room on the upper floor he spies through the blinds (his eye is just visible) on some beautiful young women engaged in amorous play. Some are caressing in the post while others undress before bathing. A harpist accompanies the women's sensuous frolicks and the prince cannot help but watch them, however aroused he may become.

This page from the Khamsa illustrates an episode recounted by a woman to King Bahram Gur's captive for amorous experiences and for their variety. But, however, being able to participate in them. In this sense it is a moral tale teaching the value of controlling desire while awaiting an eventual satisfaction that must be merited.