

SCRIPT OF THE PLAY

“THE RUBY SHINES ON”

(A tribute to the Ismaili Dai Nasir Khusraw)



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“THE RUBY SHINES ON”

Introduction

2003 was the millennium birth anniversary of the Ismaili Dai Nasir Khusraw and an International Conference on his life and works had been planned for Tajikistan. I was unaware of this important milestone in Ismaili history, and a moment of inspiration gripped me in the same year, and prompted me to look at the intellectual facet of Islam and the Shia Imami Ismaili Tariqah, and this resulted in the script of a play on Khusraw’s life, entitled “The Ruby Shines On.” My inspiration for the script was Alice Hunsberger’s wonderful work on Nasir Khusraw, *The Ruby of Badakshan*. It resulted in the live staging of the play in Kenya to Ismaili and non-Ismaili audiences alike. I am truly delighted that the play has been telecast through www.simerg.com.

I am also happy to provide the complete script as a PDF file. Please feel free to use the script and replicate the play for your own Jamat or community, wherever you are located. Kindly ensure that the Copyright notice is respected. Please keep me informed via simerg@aol.com about the initiatives you take within your local community about the remarkable life and works of one of the greatest figures in Ismaili history, Dai Nasir Khusraw.

I pray that just as the title of the play says, the Light of the intellect will continue to shine in all our lives as does Nasir’s *Ruby* a 1000 years later.

Amina Ishani
May 2011

“THE RUBY SHINES ON”

Characters:

NASIR KHUSRAW: Salim Keshavjee

DREAM: Fazillah Remu

ABU SAID (BROTHER): Anisa Rehemtulla

MEHMOONA (SISTER): Shabana Lalani

SCIENTIST: Shabana Lalani

SERVANT: Khalil Javer

SUFI: Alwaez Rashid Lalani

BATH ATTENDANT: Hussein Pirbhai

TRAVELLER: Karim Manji

NARRATOR 1: Naheeda Karmali

NARRATOR 2: Ally Manji

POET: Fawziah Remu

{The curtains open to a stage containing cushions of gold colour on the floor. Soft renderings of Expressions music can be heard in the background. Three girls are doing a swaying dance; another is sitting beside Nasir Khusraw, pouring wine into the glass from which he is drinking. As he sits on the divan, he falls asleep. The stage's backdrop is a projection screen, which goes from a flickering candle to a dream. Signature of dream music plays.}

DREAM: *{Comes in dancing stands above the sleeping Nasir}* Awaken, awaken, oh Nasir. You have been sleeping too long. How long will you continue to drink of this wine, how long? This wine that destroys the intellect, this wine that puts you in a deep sleep?

Stay sober, stay sober. Nasir, Nasir Khusraw. Oh! Abu Mu'in Hamid al –Din Nasir Khusraw of Khurasan, awaken. You are destined for big things but come out of this destructive drunken sleep.

NASIR KHUSRAW: *{Still sleeping}* The wise have not been able to find anything other than this to lessen the sorrow of this world. *{Sitting up, eyes still closed}*

Oh Dream Angel, show me, show me another way. *{Falls back into the sleep}*

DREAM: Do not be without your senses. He cannot be called wise if he leads people to senselessness. Seek out that which increases reason and wisdom.

NASIR: *{Eyes still closed}* Where can I find such a thing?

DREAM: Seek and ye shall find, seek and ye shall find. *{Pointing to Qibla}*

{Nasir makes loud sounds. Nasir's sister and brother enter}

MEHMOONA: *{Shaking him}* Nasir, Nasir you have been shouting in your sleep. *{Nasir is shaking with fear, comes out of the bed very agitated}*

NASIR: Mehmoona, did you see anybody leave my room?

MEHMOONA: No, Nasir, what's the matter? You look pale and agitated.

NASIR: It was very frightening. It was so strange. It was so real.

ABU SAID: *{Angry}*

You are hallucinating. Last night, you fell asleep here in the divan, and could even not reach your bed.

NASIR: *{Aside}* I think it could have been a dream, it said, wake up....

ABU: It's finally happened, you have gone mad.

NASIR: Wake up. Lead. Search.

ABU: All the wine you drink has made you crazy.

NASIR: *{As if in a trance repeating the words of the dream}* Seek, search, look.

MEHMOONA: *{Gently}* Nasir what's happened to you?

NASIR: *{Aside}* Wake up! Don't drink. Seek, search, look. Wake up. Don't drink. Seek, lead. Stay sober, stay sober

ABU: Yes, Nasir, I have been telling you that for a long time too!

MEHMOONA: Abu, Wait, just be quiet for a minute. Can't you see he is very upset?

ABU: Him, upset? Hah! About time. He has been upsetting us for long enough. Did you hear all that noise last night of the music?

The girls were here again, Nasir, were they not? You had them in here again, didn't you?

NASIR: *{Starting to weep}* Oh Lord, what's happening to me. What am I to understand from all this?

MEHMOONA: Nasir. Sit down, here, have some water and calm down.

ABU: Someday this was to happen. He was getting out of control with his drinking. He was spoiling our family name.

MEHMOONA: Nasir, tell me, tell me what happened.

NASIR: Mehmoona, I actually felt a sharp pain here and I woke up.

ABU: *{Concerned}* Do you want me to call a hakim?

NASIR: *{Ignoring him}* Oh Lord is there a message? Lead, search, go?

ABU: See, Mehmoona, last night he has overdone it, now it's too late. He has gone mad. Too much of a good thing! *{Leaves the room, disgusted}*

MEHMOONA: Nasir, here, sit. Tell me.

NASIR: Mehmoona, it was a message. I don't think it was the drink. It did say I should stop drinking because it was making me lose my senses. Do you think I have lost my senses?

MEHMOONA: Nasir, look, just try to forget it.

NASIR: I can't! *{Gets up, paces for a while, thinks, then stops}* What am I to look for? I don't know. What shall I do?

MEHMOONA: Nasir, be truthful to yourself, did you drink too much?

NASIR: I think it said wake up from this life of slumber.

Wake up and lead. Wake up and search for something which increases reason. Wake up to real wisdom. What is real wisdom?

MEHMOONA: Look, I will send Jalal in, why don't you have a nice hot bath, and some breakfast, you will feel better. *{Goes, shaking her head}*

NASIR: *{Aside, as Jalal enters}*

It has been more than 40 years I have lived but I am still asleep? Although I have been living a life of comfort, I have always sensed this aching desire to have a purpose, an answer as to why all of this exists.

JALAL: *{Funny accent, special bouncy gait}* Aqaa, you are talking to whom?

NASIR: Don't drink, lead, find wisdom, find happiness!

JALAL: Are you not happy, aqaa? Is that why you drink? Does it make you happy? Shall I try some? Hah, hah! *{Staggers about like a drunk}*

NASIR: *{Still to him}* I felt all this outward confidence, all this seeming control, is it only a shell? *{Jalal goes out, looking back}*

{To audience} Why, I want to know, why human happiness, why human sadness? Why beauty, why ugliness? Why pearls inside an ugly oyster?

{Paces about pulling at his hair, Jalal enters}

JALAL: Aqaa, pani ready. Come for bath. *{Holds his hand and takes him in. When they return, they are in travel clothes}*

{From the other side of the stage, Mehmoona and Abu Said enter, in heated discussion}

MEHMOONA: Abu, you are really tough on him.

ABU: What are you talking about? If we were tough on him it would not have reached this stage. Just look at him, he is now fit to be sent to the asylum.

MEHMOONA: But I see that he is very disturbed.

ABU: Well that's what drink does to you. It goes here. *{Touches own head}*

MEHMOONA: Maybe we don't understand that he is hurting inside, but today, it's definitely different.

ABU: Look, I am going to read him the riot act. If he wants to continue these habits I will...

MEHMOONA: What Abu, what will you do to him?

ABU: Ha—*{Gestures and walks off the stage, changes clothes for journey}*

NASIR: *{From outside, shouting as though speaking to Jalal}*

I have searched for answers from my teachers, from clergymen, I have knocked on the doors of so many denominations, *{Enters with Jalal, travel clothes}* begged of so many schools of thought. I have read till I can read no more. Why have I not an answer? *{Mehmoona on stage}*

MEHMOONA: *{Aside}* Oh my dear, dear brother. What has happened to you?

NASIR: Where is the truth, I need to find it. I read the Qur'an, I can discuss with theologians. I can be called amongst the most elite and distinguished of philosophers and I could hold a discussion, nay, a sermon, even, why then this anguish within me?

JALAL: Look, Aqaa, you are respected. Your brothers are lawyers, your family serve in the government and you have so many friends, why are you so upset, aqaa?

{Runs and gets a book} You can read in Persian and Arabic and Sanskrit and you know so much. Just open your book and read, aqaa, you will know everything! *{Nasir does not take the book, Jalal sits down to cry}*

MEHMOONA: The answers must be within you. Why don't you sit and close your eyes, you will find them.

NASIR: *{Fearful}* No, no! Now I fear to close my eyes as the dream was so powerful that I cannot face another. I need to know what it means.

{Starts to pace the floor} The dream said I was to lead, but whom?

{Tormented} It said, I must come out of this drunken stupor, *{Looks back at his drinks}*, so I must give up drinking?

{Show a change} I know that the mind, the intellect was first created by Allah, do you think the wine to taking control of it, of my intellect?

JALAL: Aqaa, let us do like this, let us go away for a holiday. *{Dances}*

{Soft music is heard in the background.}

POET: 'Above the seven heavens reside the two essences
More exalted than creation and all that is contained within it.

Oh you poor fool, How do you hope to be near me, you who have spent your years as a prisoner to your imperfect intellect?'

{Lights dim, and stage is bare with a projected backdrop showing journey preparation.}

NASIR: *{Soliloquy, standing at the front of stage, joined with Jalal and Abu who are also on stage}*

Allah, I am your humble slave. Please guide me to YOUR hand. You say in the Qur'an, 'Allah's Hand will be upon your hand' *{Pauses. From the musicians podium, music the ayat is recited, 'Bismillahi rahmanir rahim, Innal ladheena' to 'Yaddullahi fauka aydihim' }*,

{Continues} Allah's Hand will be upon your hand'.

Allah, guide me to the One who is on this Earth at this present moment so I can hold his hand, just as those fortunate ones did with Prophet Muhammad.

{Dream enters and spotlight follows her. Her entrance is accompanied by the dream music.}

DREAM: You are the body, I am your mind, and your intellect. Your spiritual partner at all times. So, ask yourself, oh wise one, where will you begin your journey, where will you find this hand you so crave for?

NASIR: *{Beseeching, down}* Oh Lord, hold my hand and take me. My understanding is ready to accept and I will follow your desire till my last breath. *{Rising}* I will search, I will sacrifice this life of my comfort, I will sacrifice my family, I will not give heed my life so long as you guide me to your hand on this earth. I will not rest till I find it. I beg you Lord, guide me.

JALAL: Why aqaa, do you remember, it was the day of a special planetary conjunction, you said God would grant anything to you?

ABU: You withdrew into a corner and prayed two rak'ats, asking God for tavangiri?

NASIR: *{Very agitated}*—Yes, yes, I remember. I asked for tavangiri, for true power. Not power of the world, but power with wealth, but power of haqq, I needed spiritual understanding, I needed inner revelations.

JALAL: You were blessed on that day, were you not, Aqaa?

{Nasir goes into a trance as he speaks, a traveller enters}

NASIR: After my prayer, I rejoined my friends who were by then reciting poems and when I heard a poem, I write down a line in Persian to hand to my friend to say, I had not yet handed him the paper when he began to recite the very line I wrote.

Traveller—Tell me, my dear man who are you and what have you done to be so worthy of such a gift from God?

NASIR: I can never say I could be worthy of God's graces but they did start to descend upon me very regularly. I am but a traveller just like you, but my journey, my safar is more of a search I am so tortured by questions that I am ready to leave all my life's belongings, my family, my prestigious job, for my life's answers. I feel like a small boat in a large ocean, I do not know where I will be taken.

ABU: And I am crazy enough to join him!

JALAL: Aqaa, I have been with you since I was born, and I am not going to leave you, but do you really don't know where we are going?

ABU: I think we will know as we go along. I better navigate or else who knows where we will end up with your aqaa. Nasir, I did not agree with your lifestyle at Khurasan, but I cannot abandon you. I will go with you.

NASIR: Abu, I have a calling, and I know my faith will guide me. God comes to me in mysterious ways. My journey must begin. If I want answers that is the only way.

TRAVELLER: Why are you going on a journey if God comes to you at anytime you need Him?

NASIR: Because one day, I went to Juzjanan, where I stayed nearly a month and was constantly drunk on wine. I am a pious man, and the Prophet says, 'Tell the truth, even if it is on your selves', so I am hiding nothing from you.

I woke one morning with a strong scolding that I was to wake up. Was I asleep when I saw this, most certainly, did I awaken? I don't know!

JALAL: But what is it you are to waking up to Aqaa?

TRAVELLER: This is so interesting!

NASIR: I must quench my thirst. I must find answers.

TRAVELLER: Is that why you are now journeying?

{Soft poetic music plays.}

POET: ‘So unlock my heart, and take the Qur’an as thy sole guide,
So that thou mayest know the right path, and that the door of salvation might become opened to thee. I would not be surprised if thou dost not find that path easily,
Because I WAS, like thyself, lost and bewildered for a long time.
When 394 years passed since the emigration of the of the prophet
My mother gave birth to me, bringing me into this dusty abode.
As an unconscious growing being, similar to the plants
Which are born from black soil and drops of water’....

TRAVELLER: *{Looks completely baffled}*

ABU: My brother began his search through reading books and being in the company of the learned in the both worlds, that of physics and spiritual. He called it the search of wisdom.

NARRATOR 1: Here begins the true story of this great saint, philosopher and intellectual man. The man who was to travel for seven long years in search of the Hand of God. The travels took Nasir across many lands and many seas. This journey has been recounted in his own writing called the Safarnama.

POET: Feeling that to me my own body is the dearest
I inferred in the World there must be someone who is the most precious of all that had been crated,
Just as the falcon is the noblest of all the birds,
Or the camel among the quadrupeds,
Or the date palm among the trees, or ruby amongst the jewels,
Just as the Qur’an among the books
Or Kaaba amongst the houses,
Or the heart amongst the organs of the body,
The sun amongst the luminaries.

NARRATOR 2: Nasir Khusraw has a spiritual quest now to find the most perfect human being in the entire world. He said, ‘I renounced everything worldly, except for a few necessities.’

POET: ‘As I pondered over this my soul was filled sad thoughts
I began to ask questions,
From the Shafi, Maliki, Haanafi, I asked what they had said.
I began to search for the guidance of the Chosen One of God,
But when I asked my teachers about the reason for injunctions of the religion or the verses for the Qu’ran,
None proved to be helpful’....

NASIR: *{Addressing himself to the traveller}* My friend, I know God is Just, therefore, although the tree of Hudaybiyya is not here, it is not possible that God will withdraw His Hand. God must be eternally stretching out His hand. He promised Paradise to those under that tree, so if there is no tree there is no Paradise?

There must be someone who will provide contact with Allah in order to keep the connection? He may give me some answers?

TRAVELLER: I see you have such a strong conviction, would it displease you if I were to join you on your journey?

NASIR: It is your choice Sir, but I do not think this will be an easy journey to embark upon, and although my dear brother and faithful servant have done me the honour of accompanying me, I should tell you that if, at anytime you feel that the journey is too taxing for you, please feel free to leave and we shall not be offended.

TRAVELLER: I am the one, sir who will be at your service at any time and feel honoured you have accepted my request.

ABU: Let us now continue as I know this is to be a long, long journey.

JALAL: Just a last question, Aqaa, please??

I think you know what you don't want, but Aqaa, do you really know what you DO want?! *{Nasir goes to clip Jalal's ear as he runs off}*

{Journey music plays and Nasir's silhouette is projected onto the backdrop.}

NARRATOR 1: Nasir's teacher to whom he owed deep gratitude and who guided him on the path of knowledge, was al Muyyad fi'l al Din Shirazi. Nasir's writings are in the Persian language. His works include travelogues, poetry and works on Philosophy. The most well known being the Safarnamah, Wajh Din and the Divan.

NARRATOR 2: He was intellectually precise and noticed minute details. He could admire the luxury of silk, could hold poetry sessions with local poets, and strike up conversations with peasants, shopkeepers and princes, alike.

NARRATOR 1: Nasir was an intellectual, a devout and spiritually aware person. Throughout his journey he is genuinely curious, always learning, always placing himself near those who might have a touch of wisdom to offer.

The very purpose of his life, the very purpose of his journey was to learn enough to be worthy of teaching others.

His words convey that whoever has knowledge but does not share it has no religion. As he goes on this journey, he asks questions to every person whom he meets and faces physical hardship all along the way.

Nasir commences his journey of seven years;

Here is a recount of the seven years.

{A video of the journey through the described terrain, with sound and stage effects, is projected onto the backdrop. Nasir mimes the torment of the journey while the poem is being rendered using overt gestures. Different people walk onto the stage, and Nasir looks as though he is asking them questions, deliberating over their answers, and moving on. At times, Nasir seems to understand what the others are conveying, but at others, he does not, and thus becomes frustrated. Nasir's fervour increases as more people come onto the stage and as the poem progresses. This is a very dramatic scene. Poetic music plays, as do natural sound effects such as storms, water, etc.}

POET: 'Then I rose from my place and started on a journey,
Abandoning without regret, my house, my garden, those whom I was accustomed to see.
From the Persian and Arab, Indian and Turk,
From the inhabitants of Sind, Byzantium, from a Jew, from everyone.
From the Philosopher, the Manichee, Sabaem, from an atheist
Did I enquire as to what interested me, with much persistence.
Very often I had to spend nights sleeping on hard stones,
With no roof or cover over my head except clouds.
Now roaming low, swimming as a fish in the sea,
Now high in the mountains loftier than Gemini,
Now I passed through countries where frozen water was as hard as marble,
Now through countries in which the earth was as hot as embers.
By sea, by land sometimes even if there were no roads,
By hills, by sandy desert, across streams and precipices,
Now with the camel's halter rope over my shoulders as a true camelman,
Now carrying my belongings on my shoulders as a beast of burden.
In this way did I wander from town to town making inquiries,
Wandered in search of the truth over this sea to that land.

{They stop for a rest at an oasis. As they drink, a man comes to drink, he is whirling}

NASIR: Sir, do I not know you from an earlier encounter?

SHEIKH ABU'L HASSAN: I am Sheikh Abu'l Hassan of Shiraz. I do recall meeting you before. You are Nasir Khusraw are you not?

NASIR: Oh yes, sir, and you must recall I always had a question for you!

So many in Khorasan praise your piety as a great Sufi, and I do have a question for you.

SHEIKH: I know your question, Nasir and I shall answer it.

What is the essence of God's words, 'Be! And it is'? Right?

My dear fellow *{Three whirls}*, it is Love, LOVE and Love that is behind all this existence. Not the intellect as you may be thinking.

NASIR: The love you obviously enjoy has given you insight into the inner life of those who search.

But, sir, what does love say about our responsibility to the world?

SHEIKH: *{Dreamy}* Love nothing but God. All else IS nothing.

NASIR: Such a love costs the world too much.

SHEIKH: Too much for what, sir?

NASIR: People must reach God, but through the world, not against it.

The intellect must soar like an eagle between this world and the next.

SHEIKH: Love connects this world and the next directly, you can soar the entire universe within your heart.

NASIR: My heart I must attend to, I agree. But works that encourage goodness through service to others and teaching others can bring people closer to God.

I would like to spend more time serving you, sir, in order to understand the love that you enjoy, but I must continue my search. May God be with you! *{Waves to him, gestures to his companions to move on}*

JALAL: He is your friend, Aqaa?

NASIR: Anyone who is in search for the truth is my friend, Jalal.

Look, look at you. You were so playful and carefree before, now during the journey you have become serious and you ask and listen so carefully.

ABU: My joining you has opened my eyes that I was so mistaken as to why you were behaving like you were at home. With all the best of material things you had this great yearning, and, although we have no comforts here, you are so much at ease.

Look! Here is a traveller from another country.

NASIR: Good day sir, where are you headed and what sir is your profession?

SCIENTIST: I am one who looks at the skies, at the stars and studies them.

NASIR: I have done some studies of the astral bodies too, sir. I am so pleased to meet you.

SCIENTIST: No, sir it is indeed my pleasure to meet a fellow scientist.

NASIR: If you were to join us for a sip of tea, I would indulge in understanding some more from you.

SCIENTIST: Why, Sir it would be my pleasure, indeed, for I am sure I will be the one who will gain from you. *{They sit and Jalal prepares tea}*

NASIR: I am honoured by those who seek knowledge of the Universe, but I do believe that Socrates stands next to the Prophet Muhammad as fellow servants of God.

SCIENTIST: How can that be? Socrates was a pagan?

NASIR: Socrates was a pagan but also a servant of the truth. He brings us closer to the truth through reason, while Prophet Muhammad showed the path through revelation. My question is, do we need both, reason and revelation?

SCIENTIST: I do not know if I can answer that. I do know that the Prophet has said seek knowledge even if it takes us to China. I know the value of knowledge that comes from reason and careful observation.

NASIR: I respect that. But do your observations of the stars and the workings of the universe teach you responsibility to the world?

SCIENTIST: Knowledge of the world through observation and careful reflection has nothing to do with his sort of responsibility.

NASIR: *{Dismissive}* Then, Sir, I have no other choice but to seek further. I am grateful for the time you spent with me, but my search must continue. *{They take their belongings and move on}*

ABU: Nasir, you are very forthright when you ask your questions, and receive your answers, and this could upset people.

NASIR: Abu, I am in haste. I have wasted more than 40 years of my life, and I have am impatient as my answers are still escaping me. I need to be satisfied; I need to feel that my search will get me my answers.

{They walk along and getting gradually slower. The others lag a few feet behind. A despondency seems to sink in.}

NASIR: *{Aside}* I am so disillusioned. I am despondent. I can imagine so much, I can think so much in my mind, but what I can achieve? So little. Why? Why the constraints of time? Why the limitations of the body? Why do they restrain my soul, why do they control my freedom?

{Poetic music plays.}

POET: ‘My face becomes yellow from sorrow at being unable to find an answer to this,
My back bent prematurely from sadness
When I reflected how much human existence
Depends on the limiting laws of the inanimate world,
Vegetative force and animal life.’

JALAL: Look, Aqaa, somebody!

NASIR: *{Slow and dragging}*-Good day sir, and where are you journeying to?

SUFI: What ails you sir, you look despondent.

NASIR: The weather has tried me and my companions sorely, and we are now exhausted.

NASIR: What, sir is your work?

SUFI: I spend my time reading the word of God.

NASIR: *{perks up}* The Qura’n? *{Scholar nods}*

I sir, have learned the Qura’n by heart. I follow the law strictly, but yet my heart is full of pain.

SUFI: How can that be sir, if you are righteous and fully obedient to God’s word and the practice of the Prophet?

NASIR: Is obedience sufficient?

SUFI: Of course

NASIR: The intellect must first accept, then obedience?

SUFI: When you practice sufficiently, you do become good.

NASIR: If imitation is sufficient, why then are children and madmen exempt from prayer?

SUFI: Children and madmen cannot reason.

NASIR: Exactly, sir my point. You must accept the rules through reason, otherwise piety is meaningless. The intellect therefore must come first.

SUFI: Sir, I have a suggestion for you. Over in that direction you may find what you are searching for. Good Luck to you, sir, I can see a greatness in you which is bursting to come through. May Allah always be in your mind.

{They walk a few steps in silence and suddenly, lights come on. The Sufi looks back at them leaving, and hesitates to go forward. He finally decides to turn back and join them. A silhouette of Cairo is projected onto the backdrop, followed by all the splendour of Egyptian sights.}

NASIR: *{Nasir's mood changes; he straightens up, looks upwards, showing enthusiasm and hope.}*

'Now, existing as an individual of body and soul,
I am both the negation and the eternity
And an eternity condensed'

{Fast paced Cairo music plays. The lighting shines and sparkles. Egyptian girls, flower vendors, fruit vendors and street dancers all dance to the music. The characters all straighten up, look far away, and look excitedly at each other. They walk through dancers, looking around in amazement, and exit from the other side of the stage.}

[END OF SCENE]

Interval

{The scene opens with a video projection of Nasir Khusraw's silhouette. The characters are facing the projection with their backs to the audience.}

NARRATOR 1: They can see from afar a splendid sight, the Court of the Caliph of Cairo. Cairo was the capital of the Fatimid Empire. Imam Mustansir Billah, the 18th Imam was in the seat of Imam. It was a flourishing city. It was the political and religious centre of the Ismaili world. They could see the Centre of Learning, Al Azhar which still stands as the symbol of learning where public lectures were held on Ismaili law.

{The Qasida Dam Hume Dum Ali Ali plays.}

NASIR: *{At the front of the stage}* Where have we reached? Why is there so much excitement in my heart as I approach this place? Is this where my answers lie? Oh my Lord, do I praise thee now, do I fall at thy feet and weep? *{He starts to cry and show tremendous excitement}*

{Dream music plays. Nasir is down and weeping.}

DREAM: Nasir, you have arrived at the physical abode of the essence of, the Light of God. All your years of search have brought you to the Gate of Knowledge. The Holy Prophet is the City of Knowledge, and the Imam is its Gate. Nasir you have found your hand. The hand of Imam Mustansir Billah. He will accept your bayah and your life's wishes will be fulfilled.

{Nasir excited and amazed}

Move forward, Nasir and go to him with love and happiness. *{Exit dream. Momentary pause while Nasir internalizes the Dream's words.}*

POET: 'The Prophet's descendant has taken up the seat of his ancestor in majestic glory, the tip of his crown stretching all the way to Saturn.

The Chosen One is the one whom God has chosen;
What foolishness do you keep babbling on about?
There where the Prophet sat by God's command,
His descendant sits today by the same command.'

ABU: Nasir for us, Jalal and our companions, it is our good fortune that we have been on this journey with you, so we can also offer our allegiance to the great Mazhar-e-Allah with you.

JALAL: Aqaa, all my years of serving you has taught me the importance of the intellectual search. The difficulties we have been through will all now be worth it. I am so grateful to you.

TRAVELLER: I have no words to show my happiness that I am with you at such a historic moment, Oh Nasir Khusraw. How can I ever show my gratitude to you?

Scholar- I have been here, to this very place before, but what I am now experiencing is an excitement and a thrill. I am confident I will learn so much by being with you.

NASIR: We are all together and we shall remain together as we meet the Imam of the Age and Time. Come, come, all of you compose yourselves and be ready to arrive at the most important moment in our lives. Be ready to receive what he will offer us, be ready to fall under his guidance and remember never to abandon him, once you give your obedience and promise to him.

{Poetic music plays. Projected onto the backdrop is a video of the splendours of Cairo, showing mosques, streets, etc.}

POET: Then came the day when I arrived at the gate of the city to which
The luminaries of the heaven were slaves, and all the kingdoms of the world were subordinated.
I came to the city that resembled a garden full of fruit and flowers
Within its ornamented walls, within its ground planted with trees,
Its fields resembling the pattern of precious brocade,
Its Spring of Water, which is as sweet as honey, resembling Kawthar,
The city in which houses are virtues,
The garden in which pine trees are Reason,
The City in which the learned are dressed in brocade,
It was the City in which, when I arrived, my reason told me
Here it is where thou should'st seek for what thou needest.
Do not pass through it in haste.'

{Nasir's silhouette is projected onto the backdrop}

NARRATOR 1: Consistent with any true conversion of the heart, and conforming to his personality, Nasir Khusraw looked for ways to make inner changes in his external life. What he would later preach to others, he first practised himself. He knew that to walk in the ways of his new faith, he would need to learn as much as possible and then match his actions to knowledge.

NARRATOR 2: Nasir learned the teachings of the Imam in Cairo and, the intellectual that he was, he had to study and immerse himself in the fine points of Ismaili theology and philosophy. His actions combined the required Shari' a, such as prayers and fasting, with the more personal expressions of the faith such as travel, study, teaching and writing. Through living this interconnected cycle of knowledge and action, he would enact the underlying Zahir and Batin doctrine of the Ismaili Tariqah.

{Lattice windows and light is projected onto the backdrop, which freezes on an image of the Qur'an. The scene is now a madrasa style teaching environment. The students of the madrasa are seated, while Nasir, Abu, and the Sufi are standing, butting heads in a heated debate.}

ABU: No, I do not agree.

NASIR: Nor I sir.

SUFI: But Nasir, the Hadiths say this.

NASIR: So quote to me.

SUFI: The Hadith says, ‘There are three whose adversary I shall be on the day of Resurrection. A man who has given his word by Me and has broken it, a man who has hired a workman, has exacted his due in full from him and has not given him his wage.’

NASIR: Yes, yes, that I do see, but I ask you, when it says ‘given his word by Me’, what does it mean?

ABU: I think it means a promise made to anybody, that nobody should break a promise.

SUFI: There is more to it; it also includes loyalty and faith in the Imam, because we have given bayah.

ABU: How do you interpret this? Let me tell you. Bayah is a two way promise. Imam promises and we promise. So he delivers, and we go astray, this is what it is about.

NASIR: *{Dramatically, turning to the students}*

‘What is a soul without knowledge, but lead?

Religion is the alchemy that will make it gold’.

I am talking today of gold, of rubies, and of precious metals.

What do you think makes each of these valuable? Not by comparing one to the other, for the colour of gold and brass are the same, they are both yellow. Why then is gold more sought after than brass?

JALAL: *{Raises his hand}*

I think it is to do with what is inside, not only it’s shine.

NASIR: Yes, Jalal. The quality of gold has a different *latif*, different virtue to brass and therefore more costly. Similarly with precious stones. That which is manifest outside has a hidden quality which has the essence.

TRAVELLER: So, In Ismaili thinking, whatever there is in the world consists of two parts. Inner and outer. *Zahir* and *Batin*. Whatever is in the *Zahir* is known with external senses, of hearing, smell, sight, touch and taste?

NASIR: Yes, yes. That which is *batin* is hidden but needs to be understood through intellectual search. For example, in *Zahir* what are the components of Shia worship?

JALAL: *{Jumping up, counting on his fingers.}* Prayer or *salat*, Fasting or *roza*, Charity or *Zakat*, Jihad or struggle and Hajj or pilgrimage. *{Sits}*

NASIR: *{Nodding and smiling}* Each has a deeper meaning.

For example, I may tell you that the Month of Ramadhan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. No sooner you will hear the word Ramadhan, what will you think?

TRAVELLER: Of fasting and of the purity of the month.

ABU: This means we are talking of significance. This can be understood by working with our intellect and our understanding.

TRAVELLER: Can you give us another example?

NASIR: Yes, let me give an example through.... animals. Why do they differ from us? They have not been given the faculty of the intellect. Only proper use of the intellect can take us to the conclusion of the *batin*, which animals cannot.

A dog will know that it is night and he must sleep, he will awaken early as the sun comes out. He will do that every day and every night, but he will not be able to know that as the days pass, months and years are going by as well. The dog does not know the significance of this rising and setting of the sun.

We, humans will experience not just the passing of years, but understand that we are growing older, and of course going closer to our deaths.

The significance of death, we know is means having a Day of Judgement.

ABU: We also know that this world is only of the physical body, and that the world of the soul has no time or space connection and it is eternal, it does not die.

TRAVELLER: What you are saying is simple, but I can you see through this example that there could be some whose understanding could be like that of an animal, and there can also be those who will think of the inner meaning into the life hereafter.

SUFI: This is so fascinating.

NASIR: And, *{he pauses}* there is more. For acquiring only the knowledge of all of this is equal to the dog or a donkey's life if we do not take appropriate action, once we do have this knowledge.

TALISA: What kind of action?

NASIR: Personal ethics, religious ethics and moral responsibility.

POET: 'How would you make your face an angel face?

By making your deeds the deeds of angels.'

'Look with the inner eye at earth's hidden ness.

For the outer eye cannot see it.

What is the hidden ness of the world?

The noble ones see the esoteric, but not the exoteric.

It is the world chained in shackles of wisdom;

Even in this globe seems too wide, too loose

To be bound, two things will do; Knowledge and obedience,

Your body's a mine, your spirit the buried jewel

Of these two treasured qualities; so exert yourself body and soul.'

{All move into a circle around the solo dancer, who is dancing a gentle and flowing dance to spiritual music. The children form the outer circle, gently swaying to the music. The backdrop displays a projection of a dancer that freezes when she is in a whirl.}

NARRATOR 2: Nasir Khusraw was convinced of two things, and during his whole life followed these convictions.

One of them was that we, as humans have an intellect which made us lord over all beasts and as he said with the intellect we seek out all the 'how's and the whys', he uses strong words when he says, 'Why do you suppose God gave you a mind?

For eating and sleeping like donkeys?'

The second thing Nasir based his whole life on was that action needs to follow knowledge. That is Islamic Ethics.

NARRATOR 1: Nasir remained in Cairo under the Fatimid Empire for three years. Here he observed all the facets of the governing state. As Nasir had been in the civil service in Khurasan, he was able to judge as an insider and he sang praises of every thing he experienced or observed within the State, in his writings.

Nasir's loyalty to Imam Mustan sir Billah was unflinching.

POET: 'A tree of wisdom was our Prophet, and from him

Each member of his family is with the same fruit

Today, the worthy sons of Ali

Have sons, just as the Prophet's daughter had sons.

The sons of Ali are those who are the Imams of the truth,

As famed as their father for their greatness.

Their father spread justice throughout the land;

Why be surprised that his sons follow their father's wisdom?'

NARRATOR 2: *{Enter Nasir wearing rags under a purple gown, and Abu, wearing rags under pink gown}*

During his time in Cairo, Nasir made three pilgrimages to Mecca. He recounts the grave dangers and extreme difficulties of the Hajj and said the Hajj is a journey to be made by Muslims if the circumstances of their lives permitted the possibility. He was very clear about the values that needed to be achieved during and after the Hajj.

POET: ‘ Oh you who have washed your face and head in Zamzam water,
Made the Hajj like men, and come back without a care,
For more than 40 years you’ve struggled,
Given little, but didn’t take less for your self.
You have used every kind of trick,
Sold cheap cloth for the price of silk.
When will all your sins be washed clean now?
Don’t let this corrupt fancy for the world possess you.
There is no doubt at all that the pans of the scales
Are never washed clean by Zamzam water.
While you may hide what you do with them, even from yourself,
There is no such ambiguity before the sight of God’

{Slow, soft journey music plays through the narration. Crossing camels are projected onto the backdrop}

NARRATOR 1: Nasir is now ready to return to his hometown in Khurasan. His life’s ambition to meet with the Imam of the Age and Time is fulfilled and he now returns to his hometown, in the far east of Persia, in order to carry out the work entrusted to him for the Dawah, to spread the message of the Ismaili tariqah. He was appointed Hujjah, a chief amongst dais, for the area of Khurasan and beyond.

NARRATOR 2: He travelled through Arabia and joined with caravans to make a fourth Pilgrimage. Here we hear of the great difficulties and dangers he faced. One story recounts how he was unable to drink and eat the only nourishment available from the Arabs, camel’s milk and lizards. Nasir would only pick berries from bushes. For many days he would be without food as bushes in the desert were not common to find. *{Nasir and Abu drop rich robes onto stage to expose rags}*

{The scene is set outside a public bath}

NARRATOR 1: This journey was so lengthy for Nasir and his brother, that it took them to absolute poverty and deprivation.

All their money was used and they were travelling on a camel they had not paid for. They had promised the escort that they would pay 30 dinars to him in Basra.

{Nasir and Abu are in complete rags. Their hair is grown and tangled.}

NASIR: Let us enter to have a bath, we have not been able to disentangle our hair for 3 months.

BATH ATTENDANT: No, go away, you two are madmen.

ABU: No, we are aristocrats but have been on such a long journey.

ATTENDANT: Be away with you. *{He drives them off, Jalal sticks his tongue at them. The two brothers and Jalal sit huddled in a corner, ashamed.}*

NASIR: I had heard that a vizier of the King of Ahwaz was a worthy man, learned in poetry and renowned to be very generous, lives in this area. I have sent a message to the vizier that I am here and if he wishes I could come and meet him.

ABU: And do you think he will? *{Pauses}* Look, here comes a horseman.

{Hoof beats of a horse can be heard, and a galloping horse and rider delivering a letter are projected onto the backdrop. The bath attendant takes the letter from the horseman and begins to read it, but Jalal comes forward and grabs it.}

NASIR: Here Abu, here look, there are 60 dinars here. He has sent us 30 dinars for getting new clothes and 30 dinars for paying our debts. Let us go and meet with him.

ABU: You did not despair of the Creator's mercy, Nasir, although we were so desperately poor.

NASIR: He is merciful indeed, for within 20 days of feeling completely lost here we will soon be back in the courts of kings. This is all the Grace of God. These travels are not merely for the physical journey, but spiritual growth as well. The two go hand in hand, only then it is of value.

NARRATOR 1: After further perils along the way the two brothers arrive in Balkh after seven years.

Nasir now embarks on the third part of his life, that of a Da'i. He travelled and invited people to the Tariqah of the Ismailis.

He became the head of the missionary Dawah throughout Iran, Afghanistan, Badakhshan and all of Central Asia. As we know he always emphasised on the need to acquire knowledge and then not hold it within himself. It made him feel personally responsible to preach and call others to the Truth.

POET: 'He has made me a shepherd over the flock,
Which I shall not abandon for another.
If you are not too drunk, my thirsty one,
I will guide you on a path to edge of a mighty sea.
And if you accept this advice I give,
You shall be lifted from the dark well to heavens highest sphere.
Learn wisdom. Take me as your teacher.
Become a *jewelled* sword and I shall be your whetstone.'

ABU: Nasir you have now travelled so far and wide, you have made conversions of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people. You have been through Tajikistan, Northern Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Badakhshan. Entire regions have accepted the Ismaili faith because they were awaiting a spiritual awakening.

NASIR: But Abu, you do see the anger, the hostility and the rage with which the political leaders are behaving towards the Dawah? They have killed so many missionaries. I am fearful for my life and yours, Abu.

JALAL: And mine, aqaa?

ABU: *{Patting Jalal's head}* We have always been protected and He will look after us.

NASIR: Our belief and conviction is the presence of a living guide to teach us the Qur'an for the age and time cannot be accepted by the people. Although we have not changed from the absolute fundamental principle of Islam of Tawhid, Unity of God, and Allah's Will that created the world, we do emphasise on the need for man to understand the relationship between the material and spiritual world.

ABU: The Tariqah encourages the use of the intellect and does not suggest that the following of dogma without searching for spiritual upliftment.

NASIR: Allah says in the Qur'an, 'To God belongs the Unseen of the heavens and earth, so whoever knows more hidden knowledge is closer to God'. Our interpretation of the Qur'an is putting me at risk in the eyes of the political authorities, especially the scholars.

ABU: Any person who is spiritually hungry is accepting the faith because it is appeasing that hunger.

POET: ‘The Hand of God of the world, the Imam of the Time
Has sown the seed of humanity in my speech
Come under my tree if you desire
That I place a branch of humanity
Like flowing water I am freshening with my speech
The fields planted with wisdom in the garden of true religion.’

{Both brothers leave the stage}

NARRATOR 1: Nasir Khusraw was correct in his perception that his enemies would persecute him because of his teachings. He would refute some claims of the zahiri interpretations of Qu’ranic verses and this earned him their anger.

He was furious at the teachings of the clerics that gave an explanation of the day of Judgement of an angry God and bringing in fear of hellfire. He felt that God was Loving and Forgiving and therefore, this very exoteric explanation of hell angered him, and he wrote this poem.

NARRATOR 2: Nasir is unable to comprehend why there was such intense opposition of his views as they were so clear to him and he struggles to make sense of it.

{The horseman, as though pursuing Nasir, is again projected onto the backdrop. Both brothers are now on the run, running onto stage, panting. Nasir falls, as though he is dead. Painful music sung by Sardarji is heard, which eventually reaches a climax.}

NASIR: *{Very despondent}* They were ready to kill me?

‘What madness has taken over everyone,

That they are frightened, even of my name?

No one’s reputation was ever ruined because of me

And I have never even stolen a crust of bread.

No youth did I ever beat into senility.

So why do young and old now turn on me in enmity?’

ABU: We have had to leave your beloved Nishapur, but only to be threatened yet again, so we must now rest here, in Balkh. They have killed many Ismaili dais.

NASIR: This morning some people came to tell me that although I am such an accomplished man, my message has become very apparent, and so forceful there are some exoteric clerics of Khurasan coming after me.

ABU: It would be wise for us to leave this region too. *{Exits stage}*

{A video of mountains is projected onto the backdrop.}

NARRATOR 1: They settled in Balkh for a while and preached allegiance to Imam Mustan sir Billah and while teaching philosophy’ a fanatical mob set out to kill him, and beat him up very badly.

NARRATOR 2: Now a time was approaching when a great change was to occur. *{Enter Nasir, in red pants and shirt. Sit down out of sight. Gown in Ruby red already laid out behind the rock}*
Nasir had to find refuge eastward, in a place called Yumgan, in the court of an Ismaili Prince in the mountainous region of Badakhshan.

Here, far from the intellectual centres of Cairo, and his beloved Khurasan, Da’i Nasir Khusraw turned his energies inward, producing the most wonderful written works on Ismaili thinking and devotional poems or Qasidas.

{Lighting is focused on the edge of the stage. On the backdrop, a video of a rock turning into a ruby is projected.}

NARRATOR 1: Once in exile, Nasir's poems move from the beauty and appreciation of the external world, to despair and bitterness about his exile and his intellectual solitude.

POET: 'They threw me out of house and home, those lowest of the low, those ignorant and careless of their prayers,
Khurasan has become the haven of the low.'

NARRATOR 2: Underlying all of this, his poems show his conviction of the rightness of his actions and the sureness of his ultimate salvation before God on the Day of Judgement.

Video projection OF Mine and Ruby'

POET: The World is like a two doored house,-
One for the beginning and one the end.
You were brought imperfect in this place
That one day you would leave here perfected'.

NARRATOR 1: Nasir formed the analogy of the soul being a jewel within a mine. He saw himself as the most precious thing to be found within the surroundings. He spent time experiencing his spirituality, and all his years of intellectualisation culminate into a peak of eloquence of the quality and value of the individual soul.

NARRATOR 2: The soul's only purpose is to move towards God, the very difficult task of purifying the soul, of mining the ruby, and polishing it to attain that beauty and shine which was always there within it. The only method was by the intellect leading the way, the clearing of the mine of rubbish to reach the ruby within. The intellect, he said, is the tool for fulfilment in this world and salvation in the next world.

{Soft instrumental music begins to play at the beginning of the following poem. As the poem progresses and as the lighting adopts a redder tone, the music becomes more dramatic, soulful, and powerful.}

POET: 'On the body of your blessings,
Devotion is the head;
On the book of goodness, Devotion is the seal.
But devotion without knowledge is NOT devotion,
A mere wisp of wind in the morning.
Since you are two things, body and soul,
Then your devotion must also be twofold.
Exercise both knowledge and action,
For on Resurrection day these two shall surely save
All humankind from eternal fire'
'Light your candle of wisdom within your heart and
Hurry, heart aglow toward the world of light.
With wisdom put counsel into practice the counsel of the Hujjat
So that your days and your name shines on'

{Nasir slowly rises and puts on the Ruby Gown. He walks up the mountain and slowly raises his arms. Light is shined on him. The light becomes brighter and brighter, and it eventually adopts a red tone, making him the 'Shining Ruby'. The narrators, poets, and Nasir all freeze. The song 'Ya Ali Madat, Mawla Ali Madat' plays, and the entire cast joins in on the chorus.}

[END]

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## “THE RUBY SHINES ON”

### *Publisher's Note*

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