

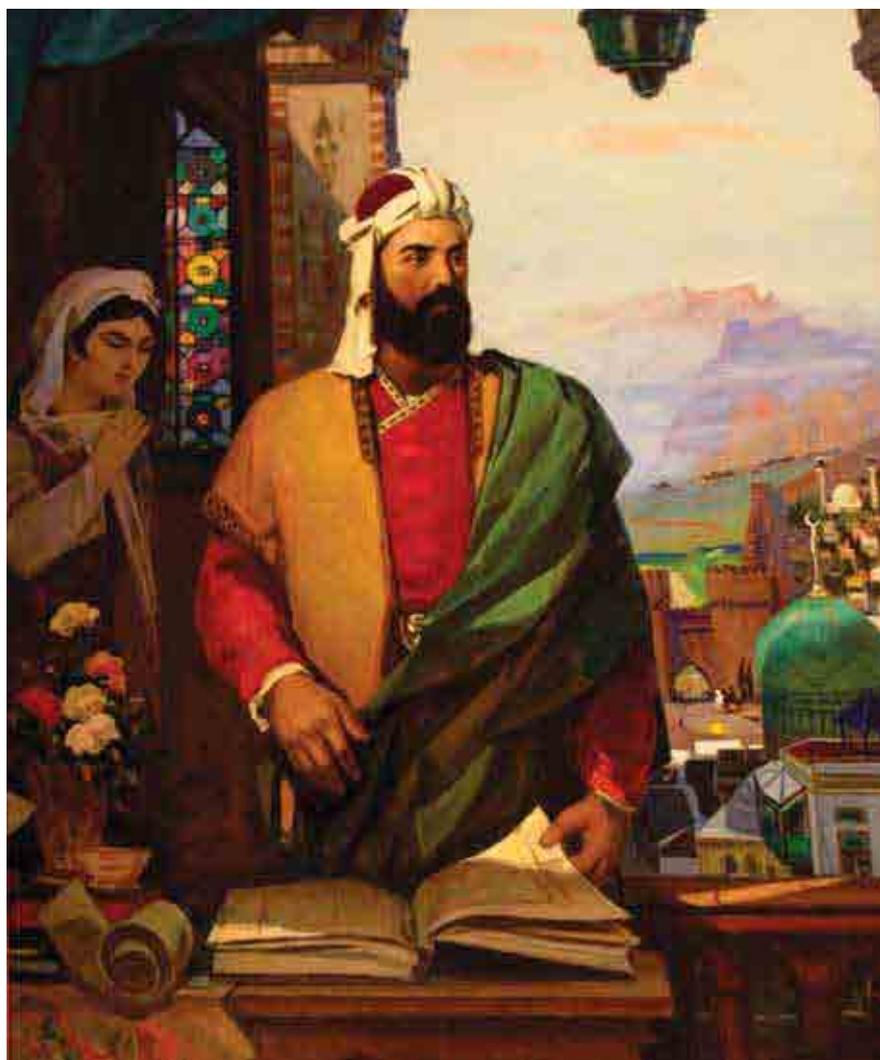
# THE NIZAMI OF AZERBAIJAN AND THE WORLD

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ON SATURDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 1139, A VERY SERIOUS EVENT HAPPENED IN THE HISTORY OF THE EARTH. IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKES IN WORLD HISTORY AND TURNED THE EARTH UPSIDE DOWN. MEDIEVAL HISTORIANS RECORDED THAT THIS EARTHQUAKE, WHICH HAPPENED IN THE CITY OF GANJA, HAD NO ANALOGUES FOR THE DEVASTATION IT CAUSED.

**T**he earthquake totally destroyed Ganja. But in its stead, it created a natural wonder like Goygol. The earthquake killed tens of thousands of people. But to compensate for all those losses, nature gave Azerbaijan and the world an unusual child in 1141. A genius poet and philosopher, who became known as Nizami Ganjavi later, whose pieces woke people's spirit and thoughts for centuries and whose works became a school, was born.

Nizami Ganjavi has long ceased to be only Azerbaijan's child. His lit-



erary heritage is part of the treasury of humanity's most valuable assets, while he himself rose to such a level that he became a child of all peoples and humanity. In his lifetime, Nizami Ganjavi believed that his works would live for a long time and wrote the following:

*Ze sad sal pas agar porsî koja u,  
Ze har beytash seda ayad ke ja u.*

*If you wonder after 100 years where he is,  
Its every couplet will respond: "He is here."*

Not 100, but 800 years have passed, and Nizami's living has surpassed his own prediction, and this path leads to eternity. A genius German poet gave an assessment of high modesty by pointing to seven great poets selected and elevated by the Persian-speaking classical tradition – Firdausi, Anvari, Nizami, Sa'di, Rumi, Hafiz and Jami: "If the East preferred only seven of all poets, there are many people who are much better than me among those remaining."

Nizami Ganjavi's name was Ilyas. But some sources say that his name was Ahmad (for example, a source entitled *Khulasat al-Afkar* says that his name was Ahmad ibn Yusuf ibn Muayyad).

Nizami is the poet's penname. His nickname was Nizam ad-Din. In the medieval Muslim East, a kunya – the son's name – was used next to famous people's names.

In his various lines, the poet appeals to his son Muhammad and gives him advice.

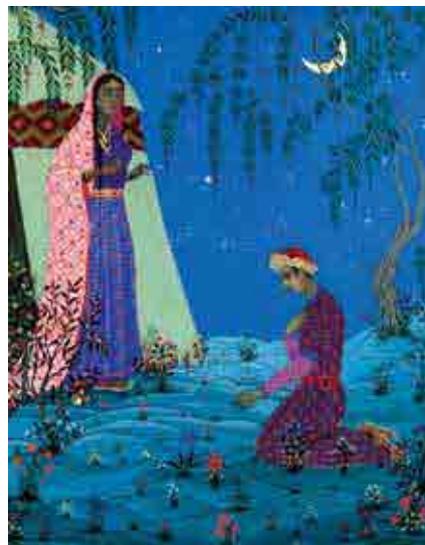
All sources say that Nizami was born in Ganja. According to this couplet, which was added by a scribe to a copy of *Iqbalnameh* and has nothing to do with the reality, there are people who claim that Nizami was

born in the city of Qom in Iran.

*Cho dorr garcheh dar bahr-e Ganjeh qomam  
Vali az gahestane shahre Qomam*

Translation:  
*Even if I stay in the Ganja sea as a masterpiece  
I am from the mountainous part of the city of Qom*

However, most of the world's experts on Nizami, headed by the famous Russian orientalist, Yevgeniy Bertels, maintain that this couplet is



fictitious and that Nizami was born in Ganja and lived all his conscious life in that city (1, 94).

Nizami repeatedly mentions Ganja from his first poem to his last poem. And one of these couplets is the best answer to those who try to separate Nizami from Ganja and artificially link him to other places. It looks as though the poet sensed this a few centuries before and states that he is from Ganja despite efforts to link him to other places:

*Nehane mara kashekara borand  
Ze Ganjast gar ta Bokhara barand*

*They disclose my innermost words  
(But) even if they take it to Bukhara, it*

*is still originally from Ganja*

Some sources (for example, Daulatshah Samarqandi, 15<sup>th</sup> century) say that Nizami had a poet brother named Givami Mutarrizi.

Givami Mutarrizi's extant literary works prove that he was proficient in the *qasideyi-masnui* genre and in general, was a poet who possessed poetic techniques. However, science has not yet drawn a definite conclusion that Mutarrizi was a brother of Nizami.

It is no accident that we mentioned this controversial couplet about Nizami's birthplace. Like there have been people throughout history who wanted to take over Azerbaijan's wealth and lands, there have been, and still are, peoples and countries that wish to appropriate Azerbaijan's genius children.

At the time of Nizami, there were two dominant languages in science and literature in the Middle and Near East. All scientific works were written in Arabic, while poets of various nationalities from Central Asia to the Caucasus and from Iran to India traditionally wrote their poetic pieces in one language – Persian.

Knowledge, rich information and high awareness of various spheres of science show that Nizami had an excellent education. His earliest poems known to science also show that he possessed high poetic techniques. This proves that from the very beginning, Nizami engaged in poetry not as an amateur, but as a professional who had learnt the theoretical foundations of this art. The canons of the time first and foremost required deep knowledge of Persian and Arabic in order to learn such universal knowledge.

Nizami wrote his works which are currently known to science – *Divan* and *Khamsa* – in Persian. Even though the poet's Persian was fluent

and perfect, in any case, according to the prominent Iranian scientist Sa'ïd Firdausi, this Persian was different from that of a Persian person, for example, Firdausi.

Nafisi proves that Nizami's poems are reminiscent of the Turkic language. Apart from that, Nizami recorded that sometimes he consulted a Persian dictionary to clarify the meaning of individual Persian words:

*Do bashad manjanaq az ruye farhane  
Yeki abrisham andazad o yeki sane*

*According to the dictionary, there are two types of manjanaq (catapult) - One fires silk and the other - stone.*

Sources give different dates of Nizami's death - 1180 (Daulatshah, Haji Khalifa, Hammer-Purgstall, Franz von Erdmann), 1199, 1200, (Atashkadah, Tarikh-e Jahan-ard, Gore Ouseley), 1202-1203 (Wilhelm Bacher, Edward Brown, Charles Rieu) and others.

Today the famous monument to Nizami in Baku says that he died in 1203. However, the date, which has already been unanimously adopted, is 12 March 1209 (this was written on Nizami's grave in 1947 - 4 Ramazan 605 Hijrah).

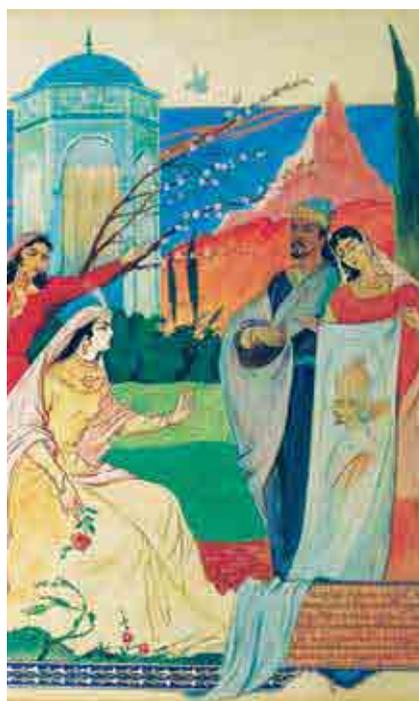
Since Nizami was not just a poet, but also a mature scientist and was ahead of scientists of his time, he was called a "hakim" - a wise person.

Although there were quite a few genius persons at the time, only two people, apart from Nizami, had this title: Abu Ali ibn Sina and Omar Khayyam.

As we noted, sometimes Nizami affectionately mentioned his son Muhammad, who was born in 1174, in his poems. Today no-one knows how Muhammad's family extended and whether Nizami had grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. However, other

children of Nizami - his poems - are still fresh, living and known to everyone like eight centuries ago. This is the great power of the word. Nizami has a couplet in which he gives his son advice:

*Garche sar-e sarvarit binam  
Vain-e sokhanvarit binam  
Dar sher mapich o dar fan-e u  
Chon akzab-e ust ahsan-e u  
Zin fan matalab bolandnami  
Kan khatrn shodast bar Nezami  
Nazm ar che be martabat bolandast  
An elm talab ke soudmandast*



*I see that someone wants to guide you  
I see poetic habits in you  
But don't hang on to poetry and poetic art  
Because its most beautiful thing is the most deceitful  
Do not seek glory in this art (poetry)  
Because this art ends with Nizami  
Even if poetry has a higher position  
You'd better take up a useful science  
Of course, Nizami, who was a wise*

person, understood very well that poetry does not start or end with him. But why did he try to discourage his son in whom he clearly saw signs of a poet?

Because he was highly professional, and if his son were to become a poet, he wanted to see him at least as a poet at Nizami's level. But he probably also sensed that being Nizami is a miracle and not everyone's destiny. That's why he encouraged his son, who was not to be higher than him in poetry, to engage in a science for which there was a need.

After all, Nizami himself also offered another formula:

*Palangariyi bejayat hadd  
Behtar ze kolahduzii bad*

*Good pack-saddle making is  
Better than being a bad hat-maker*

What made Nizami famous and eternal is his Khamasa, which consisted of five masnavis - poems:

Makhzan ul-Asrar - Treasury of Secrets written in 1178, Khosrow and Shirin written in 1180, Layla and Majnun completed in 1189, Haft Peykar - Seven Beauties - created in 1197 and Iskandarnameh, which was completed in 1201 and consisted of two parts - Iqbalnameh and Sharafnameh.

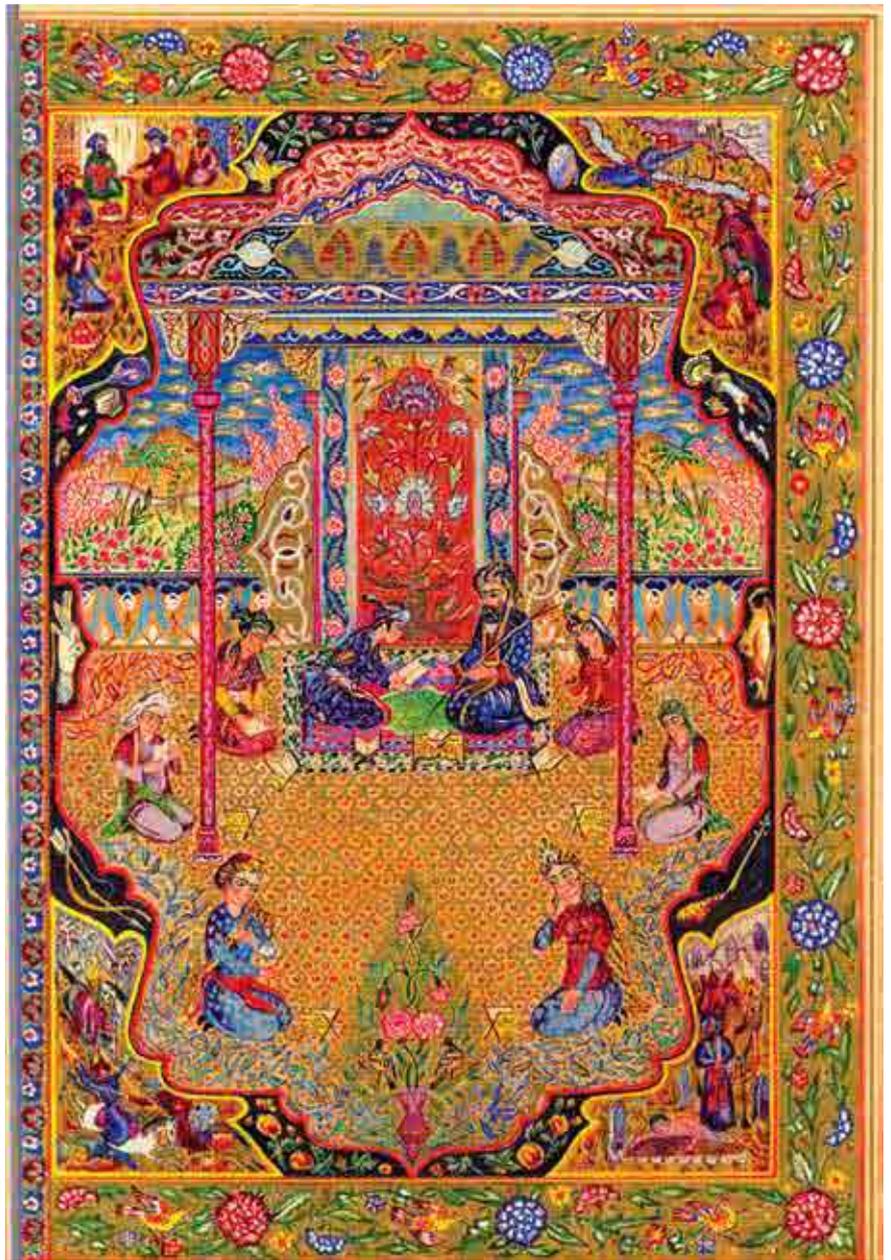
In fact, Nizami combined his five works under this common title. Had Nizami lived longer, he would have written several more poems and his series of poems would consist of 7, 8 or 9 pieces. However, his life was as long as the time during which these five poems were written, and after Nizami's death, theorists who sensed an organic link between these five poems and saw that the poet's concept, which began from the Treasury of Secrets, ended with Iskandarnameh, initially united these five



works under the title of "Panj Ganj" – five treasures. Later, these two words were replaced with the Arab word "Khamsa", which means "Five". A short while later, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a series of first answers to these five poems were created.

In India, Amir Khosrow Dehlavi created the first five, which was a response to Nizami's poems, laying the foundation of following Nizami's tradition and of the Nizami school. That's to say with the Khamsa he created, Amir Khosrow defined the formula of writing a response to Nizami: preservation of the plot, characters and basic principles - the person who responds should demonstrate his skills in the manner of expression, literary proficiency and polishing the words.

Although the doors of all palaces were open to Nizami during his lifetime, he stayed away from palaces. He preferred to live a quiet and independent life. However, his door was open to anyone and he invited everyone to enter this door and benefit from it. In fact, this invitation, which



Nizami made eight centuries ago, is still valid, and anyone who opens that door still benefits from it:

*Dar-e ma be ruye kasi dar maband  
Ke dar bastan dar bovad napasand  
Cho mara sokhan nam-e darya nahad  
Dar-e ma cho darya bebayad goshad  
Raha kon ke ayand juyandegan  
Bebinand dar-e shah-e guyandegan*

*Do not close my door to anyone  
Because it is no good to close the door*

*Since the word names us a "sea"  
Our door should be open like the sea  
Let those who seek come  
And see the door of the king of poets*

Although time destroyed the most magnificent palaces of shahs, Nizami's palace of words, despite its age, is becoming fresher, more splendid and more attractive instead of becoming dilapidated.

One of the main reasons for this is probably the fact that Nizami created

his poems totally in the name of humanity, respect for people and love.

*Kasi dar band-e mardom chun naba-shad*

*Ke u az san-e mardom mitarashad*

*How can a person who creates a human (monument) from stone  
Not admire people!*

*He seems to be saying these words to himself.*

Since Nizami always admired people and worshiped their highest qualities, he managed to create human monuments from words.

*Be mardom dar amiz agar mardomi  
Ke ba adami khugarast adami*

*If you are human, mix with humans,  
Because people go well with each other*

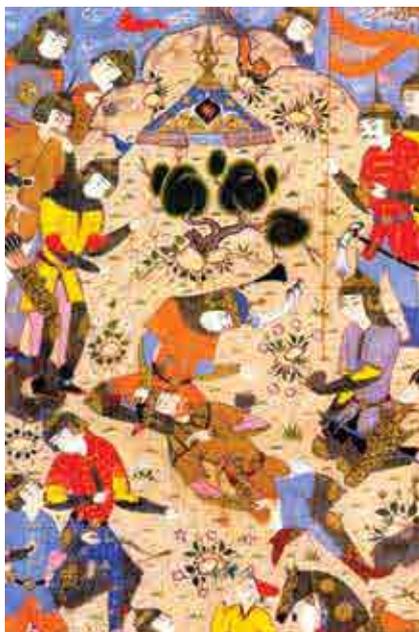
This idea – the principle of humanism – is the core of Nizami's art. Nizami carried this high idea from his first to his last rhyme and continued it from his first to his last poem.

In terms of reading and understanding, Nizami is one of the most difficult medieval authors. The reason is not that Nizami's language is complicated. No, although Nizami wrote his poems eight centuries ago, his language has little difference from modern Persian except for some archaic words. What makes Nizami difficult to understand is that he worked on every line and couplet with extremely high precision, was able to include several meanings of one word inside one line and one couplet and combined several meanings in every line. For this reason, it is impossible to just read and forget about him. It is necessary to read every word and word combination in every line and couplet again and again, try to find

new meanings and try to understand the general idea of the couplet and fragment in accordance with the new meaning.

Nizami's poems are a kind of encyclopedia of the 12<sup>th</sup> century – the time when the poet lived. Khamsa can be regarded as the most reliable source for studying the way of thinking of that period, its public-political environment, architecture, art and economic life (3,451, 454).

Since Nizami himself knew better



than anyone else what sort of deep heritage he left to the reader, he did not omit to warn that these pieces cannot be regarded and be read just for entertainment:

*Man in goftam o raftam o qesse mand*

*Bebazi nemibayad in qesse khand*

*I said this and left, but the story remained*

*This story cannot be read just for fun*

Even the best experts on Nizami have not been able to fully discover all the meanings of Nizami's cou-

plets and have acknowledged that. The meanings of Nizami's words are countless, and if commentaries were to be written, it would be necessary to write whole khamsas for every couplet of the Khamsa. Therefore, Nizami rightfully says:

*Sharh-e sokhan bishratast az sokhan*

*The commentary on the word is greater than the word itself*

What makes Nizami a global poet is, of course, not just his outstanding ability to manage words with magic and change their forms and meanings. This is just one of the conditions that make Nizami Ganjavi a genius. Nizami was a person who had read a lot. He did not read only Turkic, Persian and Arab sources. As he said himself, he was aware of various Christian and Jewish sources. If his knowledge of several languages gave him the ability to read those books, it is possible that he familiarized himself with sources in other languages through third parties. Such diverse knowledge and world outlook gave him an opportunity to create a literary world that covered the entire cultural world.

Nizami was a resident of the renaissance city of Ganja, and he was one of those who created and maintained the Oriental Renaissance with all his existence and works (4,30-41).

Nizami was a genius who was far away from national boundaries and understood his belonging to humanity. The choice of the main characters of couplets is a graphic example of this. This character can be Persian, Arab or Greek. Nizami's goal was not to show what nation or country his character came from. His intention was to find a high literary solution to his idea or goal. But it is no accident that both the main characters and other people in his poems are representatives of dozens of nationali-

ties. Nizami does this deliberately. He demonstrates once again he writes about people and for people and his poems should be read not just by one nation, but many nations.

And this was the end result anyway. Nizami is one of the classics whose poems have been translated into many other languages. But there is no doubt that in the course of time, more and more languages will join these languages.

With his works, Nizami created not just a literary model that will be repeated for centuries, but also a model of thinking, nationhood, spirituality and statehood.

The ideals promoted by Nizami eight centuries ago are still in demand. Humanity is still struggling to promote even more the qualities that Nizami wanted to see in people and society eight centuries ago.

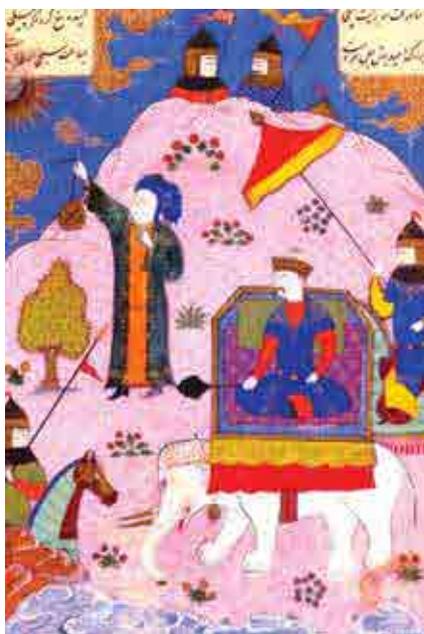
The city that Nizami described in his last poem – the part of Iskandarnamah called Iqbalnameh – was a society he saw in his dreams and wanted to become a reality. Whatever progress humanity has made on this path since the time of Nizami, Nizami Ganjavi also made an undeniable contribution to this together with other world geniuses.

In this city, everyone is equal, and respect for human rights is the norm in this city and society. Money has already been abolished. There is no police because there is no need for that as there are no violations of the law in a conscious and disciplined society.

*Goruhi zaifan-e dinparvarim  
Sar-e muyi az rasti nagrazim  
Nadarim bar-e parde-ye kaj basij  
Bejz rastbazi nadarim hich  
Cho ajez bovadyar yari konim  
Cho sakhti rasad bordebari konim  
Nadarad az ma kas zek as mal bish  
Hameh rastqesmim dar mal-e khish  
Shomarim khodra hameh hamsaran  
Nakhandim nar gerye-ye digaran*

*Ze dozdan nadarim hargez haras  
Na dar shahr shahne na dar kuy pas  
Naradim dar khaneha qefl o band  
Negahban na ba gav o ba gusfand  
Farib-e zar o simra dar shomar  
Nayarim o nayad kasira bekar  
Na besyar kharim chun gav o khar  
Na lab niz barjasteh az khoshk o tar  
Ze ma dar javani nemirad kasi  
Magar pir ku omr darad basi...*

*We are peaceful and faithful people  
We have not deviated from the truth  
even a hair's width*



*We have no dealings behind the curtain  
We have nothing other than honest things to do  
If a weak person asks us for help, we will extend our hand  
If we are in trouble, we patiently wait  
We don't have more property than anybody else  
We have divided all our property equally  
We all take each other equally  
If someone else is sad, we don't rejoice  
We are not afraid of thieves  
We don't have supervisors in cities or*

*guards in the streets  
We have no key or lock in our homes  
No-one guards our cattle  
We don't count gold and silver  
Because no-one needs them  
We don't eat a lot like oxen or donkeys  
Nor do we refuse the food that we like  
None of us dies young  
Only old people who lived a long life die*

We still have not seen the day when everyone can benefit from the world and life Nizami wished.

But humanity was longing for such a happy life for eight centuries, 1,000 years and millennia ago.

Not only did Nizami urge next generations to wish such a life and society, he also showed them ways of establishing such a society.

Therefore, the light of Nizami's word is still needed today and will be needed tomorrow.

Every compatriot of Nizami – every Azerbaijani – needs this light.

Every compatriot of Nizami and every citizen of the world need this light.

**Nizami Ganjavi, who unites everyone's wishes, belongs to everyone.**

**And since he belongs to everyone, he is eternal.**

**Nizami will always be one step ahead of us and will always invite us to a brighter future. ✨**



### **Masnavi**

Khosrau asked once: "Where do you come from, say?"

Farhad replied: "From regions far away."

Khosrau: "In what crafts does your land excell?"

Farhad: "We purchase grief and souls we sell."

Khosrau: "By selling souls what do you gain?"

Farhad: "Our bards this custom don't disdain."

### **Ghazal**

O radiant-face beloved, whose cherished bride will you be?  
Whose dignity will you raise, whose honour and pride will you be?

You are shaded this eve by the awning your master has spread,  
Whose queen with your odorous tresses and grace will you be?

You are sweeter than honey, no sherbet is sweeter than you,  
Whose rill his course with love's wavelets to trace, will you be?

In the darkness of night you're a lamp with bright light, God guard you from evil eye,  
Breath of life – o whose love to caress and embrace will you be?

You are gone, how can poor Nizami live alone with his grief?  
He is down now, whose healer his pain to appease will you be?

### **Guit'a**

Near the garden, too shy to go in, I was burnt by a flower, How I trembled...  
She laughed with her laughter of resonant power,

And the emerald garden, it echoed the sweet rolling laughter,  
She, smiling, exceeded in beauty the flowery bower.

In the morning, at dawn, fleecy cloudlets shed tears on the garden,  
And the jasmine laughed, and the violets smiled, revived by the shower.

### **Gassida**

It is I who am peer of all knowledge, my renown of perfection is great,  
My genius is vast as the heavens, for I dominate earth, time and fate.  
My breath fills the earth, it resembles the resonant chimes of a bell,  
My pen is a banner of glory called to conquer the earth and create.

Translated by *Olga Moisseyenka*

