<u>Birbal's Trip to Paradise</u> Retold and Adapted by Steve Williams

Parts(6): NARRATOR 1 NARRATOR 2 NARRATOR 3 AKBAR BARBER BIRBAL

Narrator 1: Birbal's Trip to Paradise

NARRATOR 2: Long ago, Akbar ruled India. He was the greatest of all the Moghul emperors.

AKBAR: [Proudly] Greatest of the all the Moghuls.

NARRATOR 3: Akbar had many advisors and countless servants but his favourite was Birbal. Akbar thought Birbal was the wittiest and cleverest man in the Empire.

NARRATOR 1: But Birbal had enemies who were envious of his popularity.

NARRATOR 2: Most envious of all was the Emperor's barber. The barber knew that favour with Akbar brought fortune. He wondered:

BARBER: Why can't a barber be the fortunate one for a change? I am clever. I am funny. I have good ideas. I deserve better.

NARRATOR 3: The barber's envy turned to hatred and he plotted for Birbal's downfall day and night until he had worked out

BARBER: A cunning plan.

NARRATOR 1: One day, while trimming the Emperor's beard, the barber found the courage to speak up and put his plan into action.

BARBER: You know Majesty, last night I dreamed of your father.

NARRATOR 1: The great Emperor was gripped by the barber's words for he was a superstitious man who loved his late father dearly.

EMPEROR: My father you say! Did he speak?

BARBER: Yes excellency. He is very happy in paradise but says that all the residents of Heaven are terrible bores. He wants you to send someone to keep him amused with fine talk. Someone clever and witty.

NARRATOR 3: Now although Akbar prized Birbal very much, he truly worshiped his own father. After a little thought, he decided to send his favourite advisor to paradise to entertain the old man. He sent for Birbal.

NARRATOR 1: Of course, the only way to reach heaven

BARBER: Is through death. What a brilliant plan!

NARRATOR 2: Birbal rode to court at once to hear the Emperor's wishes.

NARRATOR 3: Akbar said

AKBAR: Birbal, if I have not judged you wrongly, I think you love me enough to make any sacrifice for my sake.

BIRBAL: I know I do Emperor.

BARBER: [Aside] Yes! That's right. Go on ...

AKBAR: Then I would like you to go to heaven and keep my dear father company.

BARBER: [Aside] Yes! Company! That's it.

BIRBAL: Majesty, it would be an honour. But may I take a few days to prepare?

BARBER: But your father sir, so sad, so very very bored and sad and ...

AKBAR: Silence! Birbal, you are doing me a great favour. Of course you should prepare. I will

give you a week.

BARBER: [Rolls his eyes and speaks quietly] A week!

NARRATOR 1: Birbal returned home and

BIRBAL: Dug a deep pit

NARRATOR 2: In the grounds of his house. This would be his grave. But he also dug

BIRBAL: A secret tunnel

NARRATOR 3: That opened under the floor of his private room. Then he returned to meet the Emperor.

BIRBAL: Highness

NARRATOR 1: He said

BIRBAL: In accordance with an old family tradition, I would like to be buried alive. My family

has always believed that this is the easiest and quickest way to get to heaven.

NARRATOR 2: And so to the delight of the barber [Barber mimes happiness] Birbal was buried alive.

With six feet of earth weighing down on him, he scratched and scraped his way to into the tunnel that took him to the safety of his own house. Birbal hid in his room for over six months. At the end of that time, with long hair and a shaggy beard, he came

out of hiding set off for the Emperor's court.

NARRATOR 3: Akbar was having his hair cut

NARRATOR 1: When Birbal arrived at court

BIRBAL: Majesty!

AKBAR: Birbal! Can it be you? How did you get here?

NARRATOR 2: Birbal took a deep breath and replied:

BIRBAL: From Paradise, Oh Great One. Your father enjoyed our talks so much that he gave me

special permission to return to earth and tell you all about them.

AKBAR: Did he give you any special message for his devoted son?

BIRBAL: Just one Majesty. Do you see my whiskers and long hair? (Akbar nods) Well, it seems

very few barbers make it to heaven. Your father asks you to send him yours at once for

he is badly in need of a haircut.