

There once lived a man so godly that even the angels rejoiced at the sight of him. But, in spite of his great holiness, he had no notion that he was holy. He just went about his humdrum tasks, diffusing goodness the way flowers unself-consciously diffuse their fragrance and streetlights their glow.

His holiness lay in this—that he forgot each person's past and looked at them as they were now, and he looked beyond each person's appearance to the very center of their being, where they were innocent and blameless and too ignorant to know what they were doing. Thus he loved and forgave everyone he met—and he saw nothing extraordinary in this, for it was the result of his way of looking at people.

One day an angel said to him, "I have been sent to you by God. Ask for anything you wish and it will be given to you. Would you wish to have the gift of healing?"

"No," said the man, "I'd rather God did the healing himself."

"Would you want to bring sinners back to the path of righteousness?"

"No," he said, "it is not for me to touch human hearts. That is the work of angels."

"Would you like to be such a model of virtue that people will be drawn to imitate you?"

"No," said the saint, "for that would make me the center of attention."

"What then do you wish for?" asked the angel.

"The grace of God," was the man's reply. "Having that, I have all I desire."

"No, you must ask for some miracle," said the angel, "or one will be forced on you."

"Well, then I shall ask for this: let good be done through me without my being aware of it."

So it was decreed that the holy man's shadow would be endowed with healing properties whenever it fell behind him. So everywhere his shadow fell—provided he had his back to it—the sick were healed, the land became fertile, fountains sprang to life, and color returned to the faces of those who were weighed down by life's sorrow.

But the saint knew nothing of this because the attention of people was so centered on the shadow that they forgot about the man. And so his wish that good be done through him and he forgotten was abundantly fulfilled.