

los the Shepherd Boy

(From *Star of the West*, vol. 13, p.182, with slight editing)

You may know these three stories already, but good stories can be told again and again and we never get tired of hearing them. Do you think that the love los felt for his King describes the love we should have for God?

~ 1 ~

los was a shepherd boy who looked after his flocks of sheep in the valleys and on the sloping hills of Persia. He was poor and simple and knew no other kind of life except caring for his sheep.

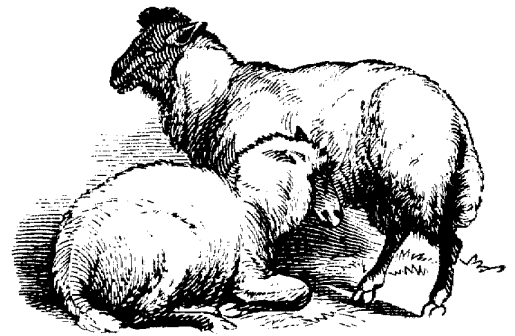
But one love he had and one great longing – it was to see the face of his King. He had never seen this One of whose greatness and goodness he had heard wonderful tales, and he felt that he would live content and die happy if only he could see his face.

One day los heard that the King would pass on the highroad not far from his fields. With a heart full of love he left everything and waited by the road. At last the royal procession appeared, with musicians on



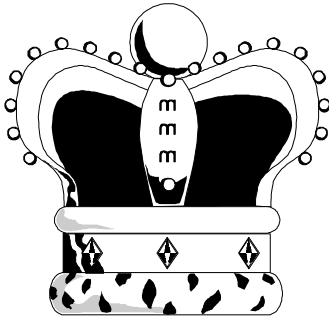
horseback, soldiers, and buglers glittering and gorgeous in the sunshine.

los's eyes gazed past all this to the King, who was slowly approaching behind. With flushed face and throbbing heart los watched for the face he had waited and longed to see for all of his life.



When the procession in front suddenly stopped, the King asked what had happened. He was told that a poor shepherd boy stood in the way and begged to see him.

The King commanded that the boy be brought, and los, trembling with joy, came to the side of the carriage and gazed long and steadfastly on the face he adored.



The King, amazed at this loving look, said, "Who are you?"

"los, the shepherd boy, my King," he replied.

"What do you want from me?" said the King.

"Oh my King," he said, "All my life I have longed for thee. The utmost desire of my heart has been to see thy face. Now I am happy and content. I can return to my humble life forever blest since I have seen thee."

The King was greatly touched, and looking long and earnestly at the boy, he continued on his way.

But he kept thinking about los – such love he had never known. All those who surrounded him only wanted gifts and money from him, but here was somebody who asked for nothing and was content with just looking at his face.



The King longed to see los again and sent for the shepherd boy



and had him brought to the palace. los came with eager joy and came into the presence of the King. The King trusted los so much he made him the guardian of his treasure.

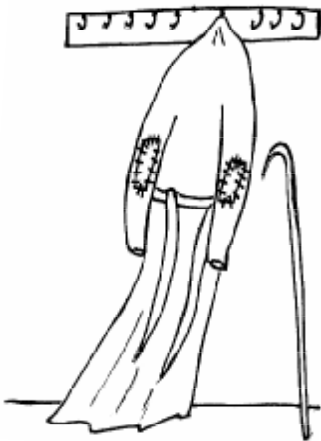
But those who lived in the palace were filled with jealousy and tried to find some fault in Ios so that the King wouldn't like him so much. They watched Ios day and night and soon they found something that made them suspicious. In the silence of the night, when everyone was sleeping, they saw Ios creep out of his room, make his way through the winding passages in the palace, and enter a small room far up under the roof.

"Ah," they said. "He is robbing the treasury and storing away the treasure in a secret place!"

They ran to tell the King the news, and the next night he watched with them and saw Ios steal away to his secret hiding place. The King followed, threw open the door and entered the room.

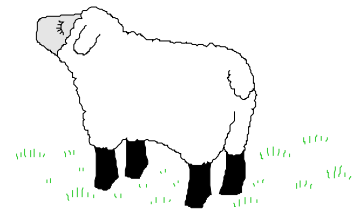
It was bare and empty, but on the wall hung the shepherd's coat

Ios had worn before he came to live in the palace, and the shepherd's crook which he had used when he was looking after his sheep.



"What is the meaning of this, Ios?" exclaimed the King. "Why do you silently creep to this room in the middle of the night and make me suspicious when I thought I could trust you?"

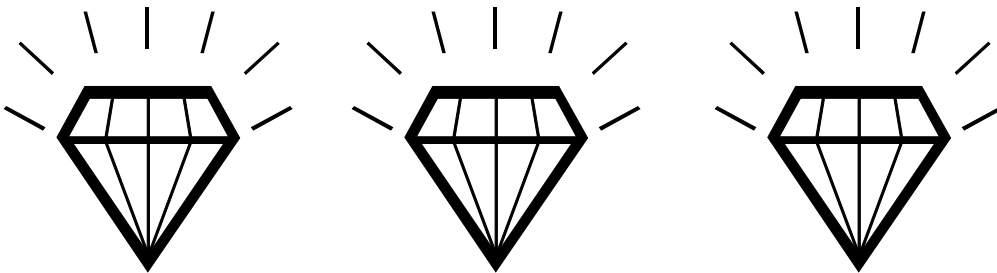
"Oh my King," replied Ios, "when first I saw thee I was a poor ignorant shepherd boy, but through your generosity I now have a high and important station. But I don't want to become proud and forget where I came from. I want always to be humble and grateful to thee. So each night I come here to remind myself of how poor I once was, and that all the riches I now have are because of you and your bounty, generosity and favour."



~ 2 ~

One day while the King was riding with his courtiers and favourites he opened a wallet in his saddle and threw handfuls of precious jewels in the road. His friends stopped, dismounted and gathered the gifts scattered by his loving hand. Ios alone remained at his side with his eyes fastened on the beloved face, never glancing away.

Then the courtiers murmured among themselves, saying, "See Ios, he despises the gifts of the King and will not bother to get them."



The King looked at Ios and smiled. "What is the matter, Ios, do you dislike my gifts?"

"I have never wanted anything from thee except to see thy face," said Ios. "This will always be enough for me."

~ 3 ~

In Persia they have a great variety of delicious melons and it is the custom in the season when they grow to hold feasts and serve this plentiful fruit to the guests. When the season came and the melons were ripe, the King held a feast and invited many people. Ios wasn't there as he was working, but the guests noticed that one melon was left uncut on the table. They began to murmur among themselves, saying, "You see that melon? No doubt it is very sweet and delicious and the King is keeping it for his favourite, Ios."

Soon, the King sent for Ios. He cut a piece of the melon and said to him, "You, too, must take part in the feast. I have kept this melon for you."

Ios ate the piece of melon. Then the King took a slice for himself. But when the King tasted it, he exclaimed, "This melon is bitter! How can you eat it, Ios?"

The boy replied, "All my life I have received sweet things from thy hand. Now, if you give me something bitter, is it right to refuse it? Something that is bitter tastes sweet to me when it is given by the hands of my King."



Things to think about in the stories of Ios

1. What was the only thing Ios wanted? Why?
2. How did Ios stay humble and not become proud when he lived in the palace surrounded with rich things?
3. Why did Ios not mind eating the bitter melon? What do you think the bitter melon may represent in our lives? If you are not sure, ask an adult what they think it means.