

A PALACE UNLIKE ANY OTHER

A legend retold

"Welcome home, my brother!" Jamshid exclaimed. "We have eagerly waited to see your face."

"And I yours," the sultan replied.

The sultan looked up to see that the entire court had come out to welcome him. From atop the entrance gates and ramparts, ladies dressed in fine silk dresses of every color had come out to greet him. Handsome noblemen cheered him. Rose petals fluttered down upon the procession, and the air was filled with a delightful aroma.

The sultan was quickly led to his scented bath, which would be followed by a massage and a light meal of fruit and delicacies. After having been refreshed and fed, the sultan summoned Abbanes, his chief vizier, who soon appeared, along with the sultan's brother.

"Abbanes," the sultan began, "in my travels to distant countries, I have seen magnificent palaces that far outshine any building that I have ever imagined. These buildings inspire the respect of their people and the fear of their enemies. I wish to build such a monument that shall be known throughout the world for many generations to come. I want people to stop and marvel at this wonderful creation."

Abbanes raised his head slightly and spoke respectfully, "Sir, if I may say so, your palace is already fabulous in wealth and glory. Its splendor has dazzled the eyes of many travelers. It has..."

The sultan raised his hand for silence. "It must now be more magnificent," he said. "I will make my palace greater than any other. It must be greater than anything on earth to house my great riches, for even now I have acquired one of the world's most precious diamonds. Should it not also have the most exquisite palace to house it? I request that you help me to build such a palace."



"Your wish is my command, your majesty," Abbanes answered. "I will seek out a man who will be able to build such an edifice of glory."

The next morning, Abbanes began his search for a man who would be skilled enough to build the palace of the sultan's dreams. He consulted with all of the best builders in the realm, but none was exceptional enough to fulfill the sultan's grand expectations.

Then one day while journeying to a neighboring village, he saw a magnificent house. Immediately, he wished to know the name of the builder. Perhaps this would be the man he sought.

The house had graceful domes and pillars made from alabaster and semiprecious stones. Even though the sun was high in the sky, the fountains in the lush garden that surrounded the house cooled the air.

An elderly couple dressed in fine clothes opened the gates of the house.

"Whose house is this?" Abbanes asked.

"It is ours, sir," the man answered.

"I have a few questions to ask you about your magnificent house."

"Certainly, sir. Please enter."

As they entered the house, Abbanes was even more amazed at the interior. He had never seen anything like the enamel and mirror mosaics or the rich tapestries that graced the walls and floors. The painted ceiling curved in delightful arches. In one place, a small waterfall flowed serenely into a pond with fish and was scented by water lilies. The vizier and his men sat down and were soon treated to a meal of roasted lamb.

Abbanes asked, "Who built this fine house?"

"His name is Mahesdas. He is retired now and has devoted himself to prayer and helping others."

"Good! I shall offer him a position where he can help his sultan. Where can I find this man?" Abbanes asked.

"It is easy enough to find him, as he lives atop that hill," he said, pointing out the window to a simple house on top of a nearby hill.

The vizier excused himself and made his way with his entourage to the humble, mud-baked dwelling of Mahesdas. Pulling aside the curtain that kept out the heat and dust, he found Mahesdas reading a large illustrated book.

Upon seeing his visitors, Mahesdas put the book down and greeted them. He had a beard and long hair that had begun to turn white, which contrasted with his simple yet elegant blue garment.

Abbanes lost no time in explaining why he had come.

After listening to Abbanes' intent to redesign and beautify the sultan's palace, Mahesdas remained silent for some minutes. He then answered thoughtfully: "It is true that I am a skilled architect and builder, and I could design and build such a palace for you, but there is something I must tell you ..."

"What must you tell me?"

"I am a follower of the Christ. I am telling you this, because what I build for you may not please you. As Christ's servant, I only do His bidding."

"Are you telling me that you are not skilled enough for the job?"

"No, that is not what I am telling you."



"Are you telling me that you will refuse the command of your sultan? For if it is, such disrespect will be rewarded by death!"

"No, that is not what I am telling you."

"Then what are you telling me?"

"I am telling you that I may build something that does not please you."

"If you are able to build anything like the house I saw or the palaces I have heard that you have constructed, I am sure that we will not be disappointed."

"Perhaps and perhaps not," Mahesdas answered. However, realizing that he had no choice, Mahesdas agreed to go. "I will do my best for my ruler."

Collecting his few belongings, he mounted the camel that carried him back to the sultan's palace. There, the sultan instructed Mahesdas in his wishes. Mahesdas took careful notes and made drawings of all that the sultan wanted.



Over the next few weeks Jamshid carefully observed Mahesdas and saw that he was an honest man. One time, Jamshid left a bag of gold coins on the table and retired for the night as a test to see what Mahesdas would do. Jamshid was not disappointed, for the next morning as soon as the coins were discovered, Mahesdas returned them to the sultan.

Later on, the sultan was called away on very important business, not knowing how long it would be before his return. The sultan summoned Mahesdas and Abbanes to his hall.

"Mahesdas, I have entrusted you to finish the task I have assigned you. This is a decree which puts in your command my storehouse of gold and precious stones to beautify my palace."

Mahesdas took the scroll and bowed.

Soon after the sultan's departure, war broke out in the region, and it was very difficult to send or receive messages from his palace. He was curious as to how work was progressing on his palace that was to outshine any that had ever been built, but his messages did not get through. Robbers attacked some of the couriers. Floods and other natural disasters waylaid other couriers, while fighting prevented still others from carrying the sultan's messages.

After almost two years, the sultan was able to return home. With each passing day on his journey to his palace, his heart soared in expectation. He thought to himself, *How wonderful my palace must be by now! Even if it is not yet completed, it must be a wonder for all to behold.*

The sultan first sensed something was wrong when his brother was not there to greet him. He soon found out why—Jamshid had taken ill with a severe fever that would not be cured.

But this was only the beginning of his grief. The sultan's sadness turned to dismay, then soon to anger, when he learned that not the least beginning had been made on his grand building project. Not one stone had been laid upon another, not one beam hewn. The treasure which he had left in Mahesdas' care to be spent in the palace's construction was gone—all gone! For Mahesdas had given it, down to the last copper coin, to the sick, the poor, the hungry, and the distressed. One of the many projects he undertook was to dig wells for surrounding villages that had no water.

Abbanes was arrested that same day for having chosen Mahesdas as builder. As for Mahesdas, he was bound hand and foot and dragged into the sultan's judgment hall and thrown at the feet of the mighty ruler.

"Is this how you carry out my commands and how you repay my trust?" questioned the sultan.

"Did I not tell your vizier that I might build something that would not please you?"

"You have built *nothing!*" the sultan yelled.

"But I *have* carried out the orders of my sultan! Let me explain," said Mahesdas.

Before he could answer, the sultan called out to his guards, "Throw this villain into the dungeon to await punishment."

Now it so happened that at this time, Jamshid's condition worsened and he fell into a coma. The sultan grieved, for his brother was most dear to him. He shut himself in Jamshid's room and would not eat or drink or talk to anyone.

On the fourth day, as the sultan sat mourning beside his brother, suddenly Jamshid sat up.

"Jamshid! You are better!" the sultan said joyously as he kissed and embraced him.

At first, Jamshid could only say, "I have seen strange things!"

"What strange things? Tell me of them."

"I will tell you all, but first call Mahesdas to my side. I wish to speak to him."

"I have locked that thief in the lowest dungeon. He will never see anyone again except on his execution day. He promised to build me a palace, but instead he has given my riches away to the poor!"

"Please, brother, don't hurt him. He is a friend of God, and the angels of God serve him."

"What foolishness is this? What has he told you? You are still recovering from your sickness. You need rest."

"Please, brother, if you love me, release him. I am glad I awoke from death's door to plead for his life. For truly black would have been your sin if you had lifted your hand against him."

"And why are you so interested in this man? Has he enchanted you?"

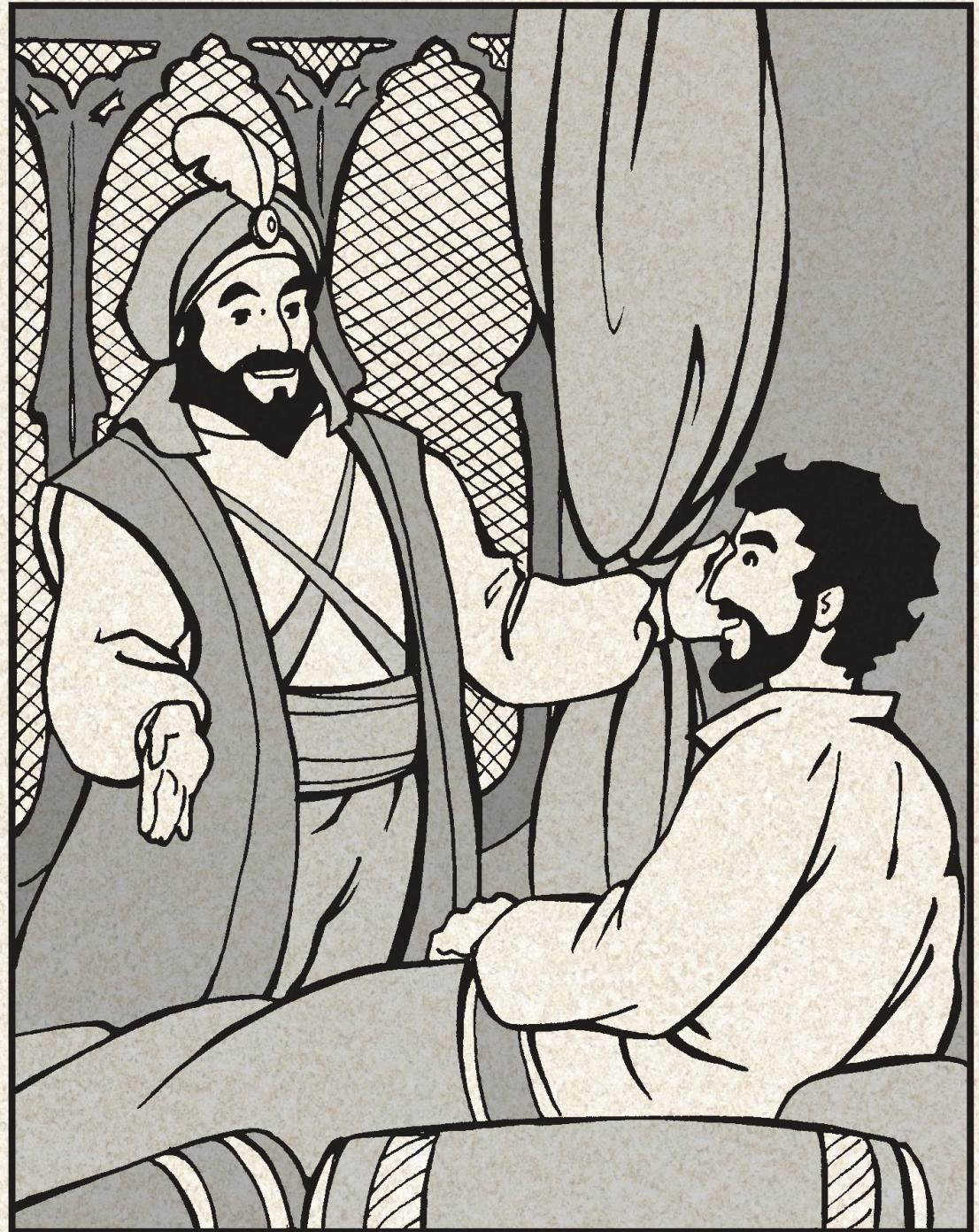
"When I was in a deep sleep, angels came and took me to Paradise. There they showed me a palace more wonderful than any ever seen by mortal eyes. I approached it by a wide crystal road bordered with gracious date palms. In its center stretched a sparkling waterway wherein floated lotus blossoms of many colors and great white birds. Its towering walls arose like rosy mist from a terrace flagged with precious tiles. Those walls were more dazzling than alabaster, more pure than the snow of the mountaintops illumined by the first flush of dawn. And there were scores of windows—some were vast and open to the indescribable light of heaven, and some windows were screened with climbing vines of flowers of every kind. Within the floors was inlaid silver, reflecting all things as in a mirror; the walls were gold, wrought by artisans skilled beyond men of the earth. Everywhere gems burned with luster unspeakable, radiant, yet subdued, and fountains flowed cool and sweet as music delighted the ear.

"What you must know, my brother, is this—the angels who showed me these wonders said: 'This is the palace built by Mahesdas for your brother, the sultan. He is not worthy to inhabit it, so it shall be taken from him and given to another more worthy.' Then it was that I awoke to find you embracing me."

"I will release him," the sultan said with determination in his voice.

"Let us do so together," Jamshid said joyfully.

Having spoken, the sultan and Jamshid walked to the prison, released Mahesdas and Abbanes, and clad them in precious vestments.





The sultan then said meekly, "Mahesdas, I ask your forgiveness."

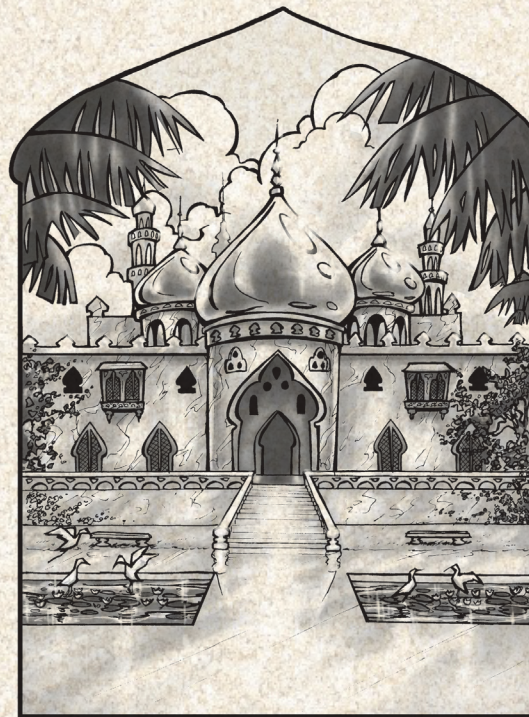
"I give it freely, my sultan."

Jamshid told Mahesdas of his dream. Mahesdas replied, "Jesus has said that in His Father's house there are many mansions,¹ and He is even now preparing a place for us. They that have faith and show love to others are helping to build it. These are the true riches, O sultan, that shall never fade away."

The sultan humbly answered: "I will be found worthy to inhabit that mansion, you will see. But, Mahesdas, could you help me to build another such mansion in heaven for my brother next door to mine?"

Mahesdas smiled as he bowed. "I can only do the bidding of my king."

The sultan was true to his word. With Mahesdas and Jamshid's help, he cared for his people like a father cares for his children. Beloved by his people, he became known as a sultan of kindness, benevolence, and one who would help anyone in need.



Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.²

Footnotes

¹ John 14:2

² Matthew 6:19–21 NKJV

S&S link: Character Building: Values and Virtues: Generosity-2d

Written by Curtis Peter Van Gorder. Illustrated by Sandra Reign. Designed by Roy Evans.

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