

Me and My Shadow

***“As the afternoon progresses, our shadows grow longer.
At night, in the dark, we become our shadows.”***

(Quote by Tom Robbins)



Dear Opal,

When I was a little girl, I vividly recall with joy a little kitten that would sit on the sidewalk at the back of our house and become enamored with his own shadow. It was enormously comical to watch his eyes when he glimpsed the first movement of the dark shape that wiggled in all directions. The more he twitched and shimmied, the greater the elusiveness of the curious inky image in front of him.

Oh, what entertainment he provided as he squirmed writhed and twisted from hither to yon, to the point that he would even jump sky high in the air landing on his soft kitten feet without success. Of course, this brought fits of laughter from the onlooker.

Opal, after bobbing and wagging in all directions for a long period of time he would eventually become so frustrated that he finally glanced at me with big piercing eyes, arched his back and haughtily walk away peeping over his shoulder as if to say, "Hope you enjoyed yourself at my expense!"

Having become so interested in this sweet memory, it prompted me to search for the poem composed by Robert Louis Stevenson in the 1800's titled "My Shadow" that my father always recited from memory to us.

*I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.*

*The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow—
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an India-rubber ball,
And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.*

*He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.
He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!*

*One morning, very early, before the sun was up,
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;
But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.*

While in the process of searching for this childhood poem, it was impossible to not become enamored by the wide variety of others composed about shadows that appeared on my computer screen. However, numerous quotes regarding the topic became a part of the mix that projected a more serious definition of the subject matter.

Then, after my husband read to me the Tom Robbins quote, ***"As the afternoon progresses, our shadows grow longer. At night, in the dark, we become our shadows"***, the depth of the topic's substance quickly gathered impact in the writer's mind.

Certainly, viewing this quote from a spiritual perspective, it is impossible to place a value on how important our relationship with God is as we journey through the seasons of life intersecting with his creation along the way. Since he knows us better than we know ourselves and desires to prosper and not harm us, trusting in his wisdom is paramount in creating the substance that makes us who we are, meaning building a shadow that reflects the radiance of Christ rather than the dark powers of the world.

Opal, in order to examine possibilities of the application of the Robbins quote directly to each of our lives, it requires the willingness to reflect deeply within our soul fully realizing that sometimes identifying the impact of past life decisions and experiences might shed light on the dark areas of our journey that we deny or bury deeply in our most secret spot rather than claim and ruminate over them. Although hard work and very painful, facing these demons will open the possibility of a complete transformation that is truly life changing.

With this in mind, first, let's focus on the impact we can have on another's shadow in the course of just a moment by honing in on simply our physical behavior when meeting members of God's creation. Do we engage with others through the lenses of kind eyes wearing a smile, or send signals of superiority using gestures of exclusivity or arrogance instead? Do we send the message of welcome or one of being too busy and important to do anything other than quickly pass by? In other words, how adept are we at making another individual feel like the most important person in the world at that very moment by intently listening to them? Since actions speak louder than words, communication is

easily delivered that not only becomes a part of one's own shadow but also intersects with another's as well.

Regarding this point, I recall each morning as a first-grade teacher when attendance was taken, looking into the eyes of each child and saying, "Good morning _____, it is wonderful to see you on this special day. I love the smile you are wearing on your face. How are you? Then, you wait for a reply and truly LISTEN!

An example of the value when engaging with another in this manner happened once after noting a sparkle in the beautiful blue eyes of a young man that had been so traumatized by a previous event that he was unable to talk to anyone. On this particular day, carefully noting a sparkle in his eyes, a moment later I whispered in his ear, "You are radiant today. Did something wonderful happen at your house?" Without thought of fear, he leaned over and softly whispered, "Yes, Mrs. Hank. A meadow lark's babies hatched in our back yard this morning!"

Recognizing the importance of the moment, that being the first time he had spoken at school, I whispered back, "This is so exciting, I am sure everyone would like to hear the great news. How do you feel about sharing it with them this very instant?" Shyly, he nodded in an affirmative manner and reached for my hand.

Then, after hearing me instruct his classmates to quickly gather around the little sharing chair, he tugged on my wrist signaling that he wanted me to sit in the chair and proceeded to place my right arm around his waist, standing so close by that our bodies became one.

Noting something of significance was about to transpire, his fellow classmates sat quietly without ever taking their eyes from his face. How beautiful his angelic voice sounded to our ears when he slowly stated, "A—meadow--- lark's--- eggs— hatched--- in--- my--- back--- yard--- this--- morning."

As a result, the children's attention remained fixed on his face and out of curiosity asked many valuable questions, behavior that resulted in a little boy's world being opened forever. Can you even imagine how many shadows intersected with one another on that magnificent sunny morning?

Unfortunately, as the seasons of life come and go like sand through an hour glass, as imperfect human beings, instead of sorting through our issues and moving forward, we become acutely aware of the numerous mistakes made, some unintentionally and others out of uncontrolled anger brought on by fear. Therefore, perhaps the best shadow quote for this situation comes from an old traditional Proverb Source that reads, **“Old sins cast long shadows.”**

Then, as we bear the weight of their worrisome impact on our shoulders day after day without placing them in the hands of our Father through the act of pertinence seeking mercy and forgiveness, the shadow that goes before us becomes more troublesome, perhaps, not only with our own souls but also to all those we encounter. If so, the following French proverb might be applicable that reads, **“The reputation of a man is like his shadow, it sometimes follows and sometimes precedes him; it is sometimes longer and sometimes shorter than his natural size.”**

So, left unattended and ignored, instead of the burden getting lighter, it only becomes weightier causing the following shadow quote from Cameroon Proverbs to apply: **“No matter how fast a man is, he cannot outrun his shadow.”**

Given all these poignant proverbs, where does such an imperfect human being go to find remedies and healing potions? In the mind of this flawed individual, the best source for obtaining solutions is in Scriptures like Psalm 17: 8 that reads, **“Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings.”**

Yes, Opal, Our Savior is a shadow that we will never be without, no matter the time of day or night. Even if life’s past mistakes are part of the substance that forms our shadow, we must always remember that dark ebony image that grows longer each afternoon is only possible if light exists.

Thus, accepting the Light of heaven, the Creator of all into our lives no matter the season of life, when we face the plethora of trials that are guaranteed to arise, we will meet the challenge ahead with the assurance that the shadow of safety is always there to receive us and found under the Almighty’s wings, a truism that makes the quote from H.K. Barclay the best conclusion to our time together today that reads, **“When walking through the ‘valley of shadows’, remember, a shadow is cast by a Light.”**



Opal, as our closing prayer, please enjoy the old hymn that best fits today's subject titled, "Lead, Kindly Light".

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th'encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;

I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on.

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,

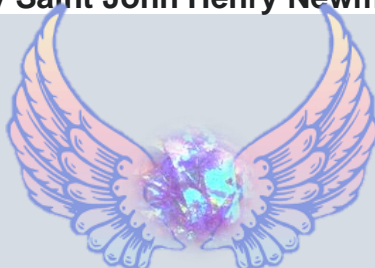
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!

Meantime, along the narrow rugged path,
Thyself hast trod,

Lead, Saviour, lead me home in childlike faith,
Home to my God.

To rest forever after earthly strife
In the calm light of everlasting life.

Lyrics by Saint John Henry Newman (1833)



*Love,
Colene*