

The Blind Ones and the Matter of the Elephant

The following Sufi tale is contained in the book *Tales of the Dervishes*, by Idries Shah.

Beyond Ghor there was a city. All its inhabitants were blind. A king with his entourage arrived near by; he brought his army and camped in the desert. He had a mighty elephant, which he used in attack and to increase the people's awe.

From among this blind community messengers ran like fools to find it.

As they did not even know the form or shape of the elephant they groped sightlessly, gathering information by touching some part of it.

Each thought that he knew something, because he could feel a part.

When they returned to their fellow citizens, eager groups clustered around them. Each of these was anxious, misguidedly, to learn the truth from those who were themselves astray.

They asked about the form, the shape of the elephant, and listened to all that they were told.

The man whose hand had reached an ear was asked about the elephant's nature. He said: 'It is a large, rough thing, wide and broad, like a rug.'

And the one who had felt the trunk said: 'I have the real facts about it. It is like a straight and hollow pipe, awful and destructive.'

The one who had felt its feet and legs said: 'It is mighty and firm, like a pillar.'

Each had felt one part out of many. Each had perceived it wrongly. No mind knew all: knowledge is not the companion of the blind. All imagined something, something incorrect.

The created are not informed about divinity. There is no way in the science by means of the ordinary intellect.