

The Blind Ones and the Matter of the Beast

(Adopted from Idries Shah's *Tales of the Dervishes*. 1967)

Beyond Ghor (Afghanistan) there was a city. All its inhabitants were blind. A king with his entourage arrived nearby; he brought his army and camped in the desert. He had a mighty beast, which he used in attacks and to increase the peoples awe and fear.

The populace of the city became very anxious to understand and see this great beast, and some sightless from among this blind community ran like fools to find it.

As they did not even knowing the form or shape of the beast, they groped sightlessly, gathering what information they could by touching some part of the beast. Each thought that he knew something insightful and useful about the beast, because each had felt it.

When they returned to their fellow-citizens eager groups clustered around them. Each in the community was anxious to learn the truth from those who has themselves experienced the beast. They asked about its form, the shape of the great beast, and listened each to all that they were told.

One man said, "It is a large, rough thing, wide and broad, like a huge rug."

Another disagreed, "I have the real facts about it. It is like a bending and hollow tube, powerful, awful and destructive. I felt it."

And another yet disagreed, "It is mighty and firm, a set of huge spear-like tree branches."

And still another, "No, you all have it wrong; it is massive and powerful, like moving tree trunks."

And finally another, "You all have it wrong for it is shaggy and hairy, like an unraveling rope."

Each had touched and experiences only one part of the many parts of the beast. Each had perceived the elephant wrong, sharing only part of the truth: its ear, its trunk, its tusks, its legs, its tail.