

## The Fool and Exclusivity

Long ago a servant was sent to the market to buy some salt and flour for his lord. "Here, bring the flour and salt to me on this plate, but don't mix the two; keep them separate," the lord says, handing the plate to his servant. So the servant heads to the market, mindful of these instructions.

At the market, the servant has a shopkeeper fill the plate with flour. But as the shopkeeper is about to measure the salt, the servant stops him. He remembers what his master had told him. So the servant turns the plate over and has the shopkeeper pour the salt on the bottom side of the plate. Careful not to spill any of his cargo, the servant proudly returns to his Lord.

"Here's what you asked me to bring you," the servant says. And he presents the lord with the plate of salt. "But where's the flour?" commands the Lord. "It's here," says the fool, turning over the plate. But nothing is there, and as soon as the plate is turned, the salt is gone as well!

So it is, in doing one thing that you think to be right, you may undo another which is equally right, and you are as a fool. (Adopted from Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*, 1968.)

Patterns of exclusivity pervade our thinking. We can first see the emergence of exclusivity at Jericho of some 10,000 years ago, with the walls being built that separate, and the towers being built that dominate. The "wild" is dichotomized and rigorously excluded from the "domestic." Patterns of exclusivity are often manifested in dichotomized, either/or thinking such as is found in situations characterized in terms of us/them, friend/foe, good/evil, win/lose, true/false, black/white. In these situations of polar opposites, any given position or category is arbitrarily conceived as not of the other and is excluded from it. However, when dichotomized thinking is taken to extremes it can also stereotype, distort, limit choices and options, and is divisive, and . . . . we are as fools?