

The Parable of the Elephant

Buddha

There was a mighty white elephant with a strong trunk and long tusks, trained by a good master, and willing and serviceable. This elephant, led by his trainer, came to the land of the blind. Very soon the rumours went in the land of the blind that an elephant had come to their country. So the wise men and teachers of the blind came up to the elephant and began to investigate him. And when the elephant was gone they met and discussed the animal among themselves.

There were some who said he was like a great thick snake; others said he was like a snake of medium size. The former had felt the trunk, the latter the tail.

Further, there were some who claimed that his figure was like a high column, others declared he was large and bulky like a big barrel, still others maintained he was smooth and hard but tapering. Some of the blind had taken hold of one of the legs, others had reached the main body, and still others had touched the tusks.

In the end they abused and scolded one another over their disagreements, and finally every one of them swore that everyone else was a liar and was cursed on account of his heresies.

Everyone of these blind men was honest in his contentions, sure of having the truth and relying on his own experience. But the elephant trainer knows that every one of them has a parcel of the truth, that every one is right in his way, but wrong in believing his outlook to be the whole truth.

Not one of these sectarians observed that the elephant was white, for all of them were blind who had investigated the truth to the best of their ability.

The master of the elephant is an Enlightened One. He has brought the white elephant of truth into the land of the blind, and he who listens to him well will understand all the claimants who have parcels of the truth. He who takes refuge in His doctrine will cease to bicker and quarrel.

The purpose to which life is devoted, also gives
worth to that life.

To see the white elephant (it may take time), avoid
doing wrongs and let your heart be pure:

Avoid wrong doings and let right and justice and
loving-kindness prevail.

Let your heart be pure. / All Buddhas teach this;
it will always endure (Dhammapada 183).

“The Parable of the Elephant.” *Parables of Buddha. The Gold Scales.*
Ed. Tormod Kinnes. Web. 29 May 2010.
<http://oaks.nvg.org>.