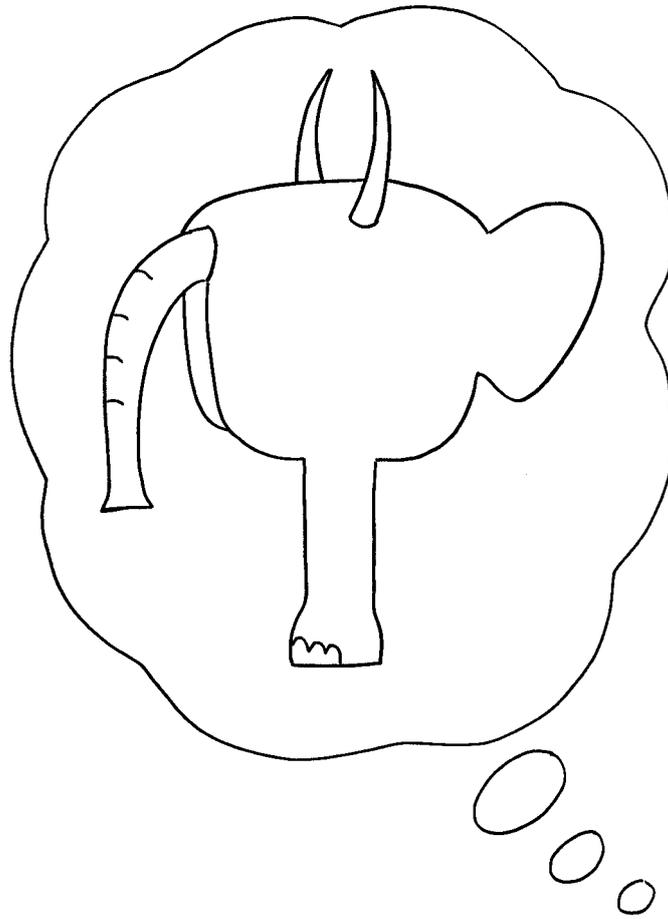


THE BEAST IN THE BARN



It was a peaceful afternoon in spring. The flowers were dancing in the sunshine and the apple tree was covered in clouds of white blossom. Imran and Muhammad were sitting by the pond, watching the ducks that were having a rest on their way north for the summer.

‘They come every year,’ said Imran.

‘How do they know where to go?’ asked Muhammad.

‘They just know the way – it’s inside them,’ replied Imran.

‘Look!’ said Muhammad suddenly. There were two men coming their way, leading a huge, shuffling animal covered by a great blanket. Imran and Muhammad couldn’t tell what the animal looked like because of the covering, but the boys were sure they had never seen anything so big.

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The men called out, ‘Come to the old barn this evening and meet the wild beast! See if you can guess what it is in the dark!’

Imran and Muhammad ran to the village and watched as the men took the covered animal into the barn. The word spread through the village like wild fire. Soon everyone had heard about the ‘Beast in the Barn’. The men waited until it was dark. By that time everyone from the village was lined up, and one by one they were let into the dark barn to meet the beast, whose blanket had now been removed, for them to guess what it could be. The villagers were a little scared and nervous to be feeling around for a beast in the dark, but they were also excited to know what it could be.

After a minute or so, the first person came out in a hurry. He said very confidently, ‘It’s like a water pipe, long and round.’

‘Hmmm...’ said the villagers, trying to think of water-pipe-shaped animals.

The second person went in. She came out and said, ‘No, it’s like a fan. It moves back and forth and is very thin.’

‘How odd,’ murmured the villagers to each other.

The third person went in. When she came out she said, ‘It’s nothing like a water pipe or a fan. It’s like a pillar in a mosque or church. It’s very still and very solid.’

‘What could it be?’ said the villagers to each other.

The fourth person went in. He came out and said, ‘Listen to me... It’s like a huge box, a kind of leathery dome you could ride or sit on.’

A fifth person went in. She came out and said, ‘The rest of them have been talking rubbish! This beast is like a pointed stick made of something very smooth.’

When the sixth person came out, he was scratching his head. He said, ‘It’s like two giant cheeks with a rope in between.’

That was the last straw. All the people who had felt the beast started arguing in loud voices. ‘I’m right, you’re wrong!’ they shouted. They wouldn’t listen to each other and were very rude. The peaceful village had never known such fighting and disagreement.

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Muhammad and Imran had been listening to what each person had said about the beast and had drawn a picture on the ground in the moonlight. They put each piece of the jigsaw together as best as they could, but it did not look quite right to their eyes.

Suddenly, Imran had an idea. He went home, got a lantern, and then he and Muhammad tiptoed into the barn while everyone was arguing. They lit the lantern and what do you think they saw? They saw an animal with a trunk like a water pipe, ears like fans, legs like pillars, a big round body you could ride on, tusks like pointed sticks and a tail flapping on a great big bottom. What kind of animal is this? An elephant of course! ‘Wow!’ said Muhammad and Imran. They had never seen an elephant before.

Elephant smiled at them and felt their faces with his trunk. Suddenly, his trunk wrapped them up and lifted them onto his back,

When they walked outside, the people *were* still arguing about the elephant. Imran and Muhammad smiled and then said, ‘Um, excuse us!’ The people looked up in astonishment and finally realised. They could see how all the different body parts fit together – it all made sense!

‘Wow!’ they all gasped. ‘What magnificent animals God has put upon this earth. We’ve never seen anything like this elephant!’

‘You were right *and* I was right!’ one villager said to another. ‘But none of us was completely right. Each of us had just a little piece of the truth. Only God is All-Knowing! Next time we must listen to each other,’ they said and started to say sorry, shake hands and hug each other.

The people brought food for Elephant to eat, and from that day on he was honoured in the village. Each year, Elephant would come to feast with the villagers and give all the children rides – and remind everyone that there are lots of different ways to see the Truth.

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