

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE WORLD

The daily world news that comes to us seems to hold little 'good news'. I find myself constantly listening to reports of countries at war, politicians unable to dialogue or compromise, and societies with multiple strong, unchangeable views on a host of issues.



Watching all of this night after night, after night, on one such night the story of the '*Blind Men and an Elephant*' quietly rose in my consciousness:

The Parable

### THE ELEPHANT AND THE BLIND MEN.

*A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable." So, they sought it out, and when they found it they groped about it. In the case of the first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said "This being is like a thick snake". For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said, "elephant is a wall'. Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.<sup>i</sup>*



As I thought of this story I imagined each country in the world holding on to a part of the elephant and being unable to move because each thought that its part was the whole.

It would seem that the dualistic mindset of the human species is as strong as ever in every arena of life – local, national and international. Each has a

point of view gained from their own experience and results in words or behaviours that suggest:

*"I am right"*

*"This is how it has always been"*

*"You don't understand"*

*"We can't forget or forgive"*

*"You weren't there"*

*"We had to survive"*

*"It was kill or be killed"*

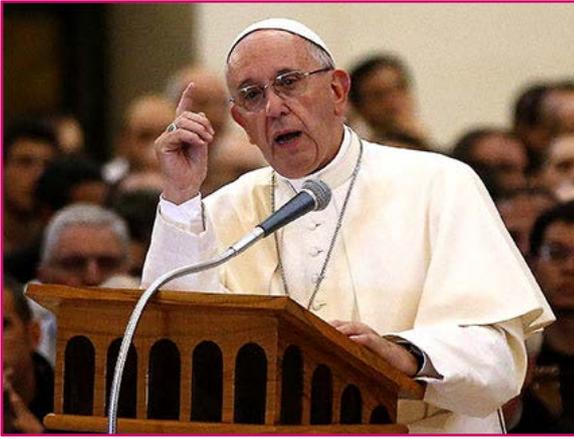
*"It is for love of my country, my religion...my family"*

... and so on.

Like the blind men and the elephant, all of these are true. All of them are mingled with identity, culture, religion, a need to belong, fear, power, control. All are real and true elements of life. Thus we understandably stand strong and cling to our part of the elephant and fight for it as our ultimate truth. But is it **'The Truth'**? Amidst all this clinging to our version of truth we remain blind to the inequality, injustices, greed and evils of our time and are often left overwhelmed by them all.



If only we could stop shouting, fighting, hurting each other and step back, calm down, try to listen to others and so come to some genuine dialogue. Perhaps then... slowly, the veil of our blindness might be lifted. Perhaps then we could come to a consciousness of something much bigger that lies beyond our comprehension. Then, and only then might we perceive our own smallness, and yet also our great significance as a species in this unfathomable evolving universe. Then, and only then could we begin to stop clinging to the snake, the fan, the tree trunk, the wall, the rope and the spear of the blind men's perceptions and endeavour to both comprehend and accept that, beyond all the differences of perception, there may lie something much 'more'.



In order for this to even begin to happen, we must have the courage to step back from the elephant and so catch a glimpse of something so much bigger than us, something beyond our individual imaginings, something that draws us in whilst at the same time blows our minds and leaves us holding mystery with all of its unknowns and uncertainties!

Maybe this is rather an unrealistic dream – a hope, a cry for peace amidst a darkness that is growing in impatience. Maybe this darkness is the elephant - a huge elephant that will not stand still quietly forever. It will break free and unleash its hidden power unchecked if it is not freed by those who hold it captive.

As CEN members can we in our time of quiet contemplation hold the image and story of the elephant? Can we be part of the freeing agent that recognises the strength, power and possibility of **the whole** of this huge animal in our midst and allow its fetters to be loosened? As we sit in silence together and feel with those who are fettered, in pain or living in darkness for one reason or another, can we release the fetters, step back and join hands together as one as we grow in wisdom and understanding of each other’s giftedness and potential? In this process, can we sense the power and potential of **the whole** to do greater things than can be done when forces are competing and arguing as to who is better...bigger...stronger?

May the darkness of our times, our clinging and fighting for what we perceive to be right, be cast into the Light - a Light that reveals something so much bigger, a yearning for union beyond comprehension.

May our stepping back, our seeing more clearly enable us to perceive life more non-dualistically, thus seeing and focusing outwards from the very heart of the elephant?

May our letting go and joining hands together as one, enable us to grow in admiration and understanding of each other’s giftedness and potential contribution to the larger whole...of which each of us is a smaller part?



Let us all, together, recognise the elephant in the room of the world's darkness and set it free to be all that it can be and can do when its power is harnessed for the good of the whole world...the whole cosmic body!



#### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts: and though all its parts are many, they form one body... .. 1 Cor. 12:12*

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<sup>i</sup> (Wikipedia: The earliest mention of this story occurs in the Rigveda, and a complete version is traceable to the Buddhist text Udana 6.4, dated to 1st millennium BCE).<sup>i</sup>

