

Know in Part or Know the Whole

There were once six blind men who had often heard of elephants, but they had never seen an elephant. One day an elephant was brought to the market. The six blind men were eager to find out what this huge beast was like.

The first blind man put his hand on the elephant's side. "Uh! This beast is like a wall," said the first man. The other blind men did not believe him.

"No, it is not like a wall. It is like a spear," said the second blind man, because he felt the elephant's tusk. The other blind men did not believe him, either.

"No, both of you are wrong. It is not like a wall or a spear. It is like a snake," said the third blind man, as he was holding the elephant's trunk. Three of them started to quarrel and did not agree with one another.

The fourth blind man decided to feel the elephant himself. He grasped one of the elephant's legs and said, "Oh, now I know an elephant is as tall as a tree."

The fifth blind man wanted to feel the elephant, too. He happened to hold one of the elephant's ears. "The elephant is moving like a fan. It is a huge fan," said the fifth blind man.

The sixth blind man thought he was the smartest to find out what an elephant was like. He seized the elephant's tail and cried out, "All of you are wrong. The elephant is not like a wall, nor a spear, a snake, or a tree. Neither is it like a fan. I feel an elephant as stringy as a rope."

All the six blind men believed that they knew what an elephant looked like, but none of them really knew what an elephant was really like. A wise man passing by saw the six blind men quarreling. The wise man said, "All of you touched a different part of the elephant. That is why you are all right."

"You knew in part but not the whole. That is why you are wrong about reality."