

## **The Elephant and the Blind Friends**

*A story of respect for each other's opinions*

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Once there were five friends who were blind. They were the best of friends. They went everywhere together and always helped each other keep up their small cottage. Even though they couldn't see, they kept their home very neat. They knew where everything was, and if ever anything was out of place they could tell right away. The chair belonged under the table. The cup went on the second shelf and the towel belonged on the rack. They could smell all the different aromas. And they could hear even the tiniest mouse creeping along to pick up a crumb they might have dropped. They could feel the differences when they touched something. And so it was in the order of their lovely home.

They loved to go for walks together and knew every path. They even knew how many steps it took to get to their favorite tree where they would love to sit in the shade on a sunny day. There the birds would sing, the butterflies would brush by their faces and the cool breeze would bring the scent of the flowers. Everything was in its place. And they were as happy as friends could be.

One day as they were out for their walk, a strange thing happened. The earth started to shake and they heard a sound like a trumpet. Then everything was quiet. Though they could not see her, a great big elephant had come in search of food and had stopped right in the middle of their path.

The friends were very brave. "Let's go a little further and see if we can discover what caused those loud sounds." And so they continued on their path. It didn't take long, before they bumped right into the elephant. The elephant was very kind and rather amused. She had never seen a blind person before and couldn't believe that as big as she was, these people couldn't see her.

So she stood very still and waited to see what would happen. One of the friends heard a swishing sound and reached up to see what was causing it. He grabbed the elephant's tail and shouted, "I have found a broom."

Meanwhile another had run into the elephant's side. She put her hands up and moved slowly along. "I have found a big wall. It's very tall and long," she cried.

The third friend found one of the elephant's feet. "I have found a giant pillar. Oh, it's very heavy," he grunted, as he tried to lift it. But it wouldn't budge.

The fourth touched the elephant's tusks. "Oh, I have found two huge spears," she called, stepping back.

The fifth friend found the trunk, and grabbed hold with both hands. The elephant kept quiet but slowly moved its trunk back and forth. "Oh, I have found a giant snake," cried the fifth and quickly let go.

For the first time in their lives, the friends began to argue. "It is like a broom!" "No, a pillar!" "No, it is like a spear!" "But I have felt a wall!" "And I have found a snake!" "You all are wrong." Each was holding fast to their own position.

Now the elephant spoke. "Don't be foolish and fight over such small things," she said. "You are all right. I am an elephant. Because you are blind and cannot see me, each of you found a different part of my body." The blind friends began to laugh. How silly they were to fight with each other. Each had discovered a different part of the whole elephant.

This is a special lesson. Because the elephant was so large, these friends could only discover small parts of it. Each of them was right in their discovery and their understanding. BUT they were wrong to think that they knew everything, and that their friends' points of view were wrong. People may see the same thing and describe it differently. That doesn't mean they are mistaken. The Truth is very large and everyone only sees a little piece of it.

**Thoughts:**

So my fellow travelers, it's good to learn to respect each other's opinions. Each of us may see the world from different angles. Remember, others may see something we don't.

**Essential Question:**

Why is it important to respect each other's opinions?

**Sample Questions:**

Is there more than one way to be "blind?" (Ignorance is a major kind of blindness)

Have we ever bumped into an "Elephant in the room" because we were blind to the issue?

What special lesson did the friends learn from the elephant? Can we overcome our differences by examining "all" parts of a situation.

**Application:**

Are there important issues today that people disagree on? Name a few?

Can both sides be right?

Let's think of ways we can find agreement – or at least find peaceful ways to disagree?

Or have you ever looked through a prism – and seen different colored light?

Can someone look at one side of an object and see something different from the other?

Looking at the front or the back – one side or the other – does that describe the whole?

Can we see the dark side of the moon? Does that mean it is not there?

**Background:**

This story comes from the Jain tradition. It teaches and reinforces a basic tenet that the Truth is so large no one can understand all parts of it. Everyone will have their own perspective which we should try to understand.

The story is also present in Buddhist teachings. The elephant symbolizes the wise Buddha who has come to teach the people in the world who are blind to wisdom.

**links and Resources:** [www.wisdomthinkers.org](http://www.wisdomthinkers.org)