

Personal Experience and Connection with God
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The Blind Men and The Elephant

John Godfrey Saxe's (1816-1887) version of the famous Indian legend,

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The *First* approach'd the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, -"Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The *Third* approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The *Fourth* reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he,
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

MORAL.

So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
*And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!*

The elephant in this story is a metaphor for God, the blind men, the way we each as humans understand what that is. As illustrated so beautifully in the story, the connection we have to God varies for each of us...a different part of the elephant within our grasp; a different piece of the Great Puzzle of what God is to us individually or what that notion brings to mind. I humbly ask you to respond to these questions on your own within your own minds. What does the notion of God mean to you? What feelings beckon with the onslaught of such a nameless, formless, ambiguous, being?

Does it bring to mind funny thoughts like, we can't understand so why bother? Maybe it invites pain or disbelief because of its association with bad memories you have from the past. Or does it bring to mind a precise set of words and a concept perhaps not yours at all but taught to you? What frame of mind do you find yourself in when I say the word God? It is a loaded word for sure. The idea that we ourselves have a connection to some higher intelligence, a higher form of participation in the universe may seem audacious and its existence can never be proven but **to most of humanity it can be felt...**and that is what I here to talk about today.

In my time as an interfaith minister I've seen how we all relate to God in many different ways and at many different levels. Even those of us who do not relate to the idea of God still find a kind of deeper meaning to life in nature and humanity. SO there is a connecting point to this idea of the nature of meaning and the varying ways humans seek that meaning in life. The Unitarian Church itself carries these concepts at the very core of its covenant in stating "acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth" and also "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. I myself carry the meaning of my life at the very core of my being and that is my relationship with God whether right or wrong to some it is worthy to note that it is my best card played. It is indeed why I stand here before you and not at a desk job.

Let me start out by saying I believe the connection we have to God is based on a system that tells us too much about another's form of Connection. That the Gateway is in our hands, it is in the small portions of that Great elephant that we cannot quite grasp. It is in the deep personal love portrayed to us that we come to **know** what God is best. It is the Love that we see, hear and feel. It is the love that we notice and abide by when we are acting from our truest highest forms of self expression. We answer to the call of love much quicker and with more dedication than to any other type of need. It is then thru us that the Love of God stands, speaks, communes, connects and circulates. But what about our inner needs to connect to the divine? Who or what do you turn to in choosing to experience your own loving relationship with what God is to you?

If a connection to God is intrinsic, it must be seeded at a deeper level of consciousness than where most of what we do, say and act like sprouts from. We act according to societal standards. Much of what we determine ourselves to be and therefore our mind set is based on our conditionings whether behavioral, cultural, religious, and conditioned thinking patterns. They are all precursors to what we will see ourselves as in terms of our social, physical and mental identity. **These external influences can strongly deter the state of consciousness in which we connect with God and meaning and life purpose, all within that deep seeded place inside. You may call it the indwelling of the web of all existence of which we are part** (that last bit taken in part again from the tenets of the Unitarian Universalist Church). So, if we quiet ourselves on the inside enough to really feel what life is like on the backside of the eyelids and inside of the ears, tiny pieces of information come at us by way of what we often determine is an intuitive glance from a higher intelligence that goes beyond accepted presiding normal states of mind. This cognitive switch from one source of exterior understanding to an interior meditative engagement is a way to sort of eaves drop on the mind of what ticks inside us. I call this an **enabling of inner spirituality** an eaves dropping, perhaps, into the realm of God that is merged within our own.

What is our spirituality? And How is it practiced in accordance with what already is known from others that came and laid example? I think it is always important not only to discover what it is that God is to you but to look and see what has been brought to us by our fellow brothers and sisters from ancient teachers to modern day spiritual gurus. Their sacred understandings lead us through spiritual evolutionary gateways but from another's perspective. And from another's perspective the scenery is always different; you may not find what was exactly intended. Your consciousness level may determine which of another's spiritually significant gateway you will allow yourself to trod thru, but the weight won't be the same to you as it was to the person who consciousness level at the time discovered that gateway of awareness to begin with. That is to say **we do not receive from allowing ourselves to be coerced into following another's divine path unless it leads us ultimately to our own.** Still, common to our society, our own personal Gateways to Gnosis(meaning spiritual understanding and knowledge) often are so importantly fixed upon old processes, ancient individuals who have laid their own ways, that we get confused about ours. Is that or this the righteous path? Have I found God if too eat a vegetarian diet or pray 5 times a day. If the Buddha could sit & meditate under a tree for several years and become enlightened does that mean I will too? Jesus spent 40 days in the desert and came back with a divinely inspired purpose...Many people have gone to the desert since for the same reason and came back with sand in their shoes. What is the difference? We are each different and enabling our own sense of inner spiritual connection enlightens our hearts not our heads.

We can stop needing the next book, the next phenomena, the next new/ancient teaching to take us there.

Failure is to abide in the idea that we are all bound to *one way* of teaching each other about our own spiritually significant experiences. We are not bound to say that it is like this or like that, it is what it is to each person and that is the scenario that we will abide by in the future. To release all expectation and let ourselves bask in the glory of knowingness that it can be very different for you and for me. And that is right and well within our soul and our mind.

I have had my own personal experiences in connecting with what I call God and I have defined them in my own terms. I can speak about them a little today but the reality of the situation is this, how much do I tell of my story in order to create another's connection from which they too will experience what I call Gnosis. Each of us has the connection, so I believe, and each of us utilizes it differently in our lives. I can only really justify my claims by stating my own personal encounters & experiences have made me real to myself, they have given me hope and they have provided me a new way to look at the world and all its people, they have given me a voice and more & more reason to live in less and less sure times. That is my testimony. I am proud to say I hear the calling of spirit in my own way, I am proud to say that although I come from a background that was strongly influenced by religious dogma, I have reached a point where religion and the pathways of saints and sages cannot longer hold my bounds **I am a free agent** spiritually and belong to no one except me, myself, in Oneness with the loving nature of God.

Religion has done good where we are lacking any insight into the mind and manner of what God could be. Religions around the world have taught us in many ways that we go on forever, that our souls abide in a loving relationship with an overall creator and that this creator, which goes by many names, can be known to us. Many religions however, have also produced reason to fear the heart and ignore the capabilities that lie intrinsic to us though listening here (heart) ...from a space of IN-SIGHT and knowingness.

Where one's religion itself is based on pure and undying belief, the spirituality of a person, is based on intimate experiences of connection, first hand involvement, those means by which we come to know God or Gnosis **based not on what others teach us but on what we individually go thru in recovery of our divine purpose**. That part of us that **is** the gateway thru which we come **best** to know God-consciousness within.

Haven't we all had those amazing moments when we feel something is watching out for us, living with us, calling out to us. When the word "coincidence" just barely provided explanation. Do we become aware of those ecstatic moments of divine intervention because someone yelled at you "hey, this here is a divinely inspired moment you having right now!" No, instead you know from another source, we can call it a voice within but I prefer to say it is not a voice at all but a knowingness that spring forth as a thought, or a tingle feeling, an insight that lets you know something special is going on behind the scenes and you may be the only one to feel it in a room of many people. It is a **divine charge**. They may only occur once in many years or if you are really willing and open they can happen over and over again as connection with our divinity will plant the thoughts and actions that lead to the fruition of your entire life. A motivated spiritual person is good at listening and taking notice of that silent knowingness to determine the divine charge in any given situation. Becoming aware of this is a great way to cooperate in your own awakening experience; you will see that there is constant communication going on between you and the spirit within.

It is not easy to compare and contrast our experiences of what God is to each of us. If I asked all of you to each create a picture of what God was...what picture would tell another's full story. More like we would need to post them all up, make a larger collage and surmise what is implied by using the total sum of parts. Likewise, each of the 6 blind men's piece of the elephant was important too. If they had all gathered onto one side we would have an even worse idea of what the elephant was like.

As we exist simultaneously as God we come to understand that the fabric from which we are woven is actually one large tapestry and we each take our place as an important part of the history and function of God in the form of the human race within its thread. As people go we often look to each other's spiritual journey for the approval or validation of our own, even as the colors of our personal experience are as significant to God as colored patterns would be to a tapestry. Each is cherished and necessary and even the strange or unusual have their place.

No matter what, connection and development of a personal relationship with God is our Right. And it is right that we allow and celebrate all its forms. Not judge and condemn but rather acknowledge and allow these forms to take place, celebrating the Great Elephant of God in its entirety as it is viewed thru the somewhat blind eyes of human kind. Is it not inevitable that we take the concept of the great omnipresence and reach out towards it with our own hands, our minds wide open to discover for each one of us what it has to give, what we have to learn from it?

Remember, a new form/level of consciousness begins to appear when we start to see just beyond the realities of the everyday **so be on the lookout for the divine charge in your life.** This higher level of spiritual awareness, this inner correspondence comes forth thru us, not from somewhere or someone outside ourselves though we can find good teachers and tools that help to lead us in the right direction. **Every personal experience with the divine is your own however,** you are in charge of your own realities when it comes to the understanding and the personal fulfillment you receive in connections to and from what God is to you. Whatever might come it will at least be **your step** in the right direction.

I invite you to go ahead...put your hands on that elephant and tell us what **you** feel.