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My Dearest Son Mohamed,

Now that I am gone, I am, as promised passing the heirloom ring to the son I love most. This ring has the magical ability to render its owner pleasant in the eyes of God and mankind. Go forth my son and live such that the ring's powers prove true. Live by the religion you have learned from those you respect. Respect other religions, because all contain one spiritual thread, and these threads are always seeking each other, wanting to join. Do not hold those different as Infidels; they too attain salvation. The ways of the ring and providence are infinite. Remember if God held all Truth in his right hand, and in his left, nothing but an ever-restless striving after Truth with the condition of forever erring, and told me to choose, I would reverently choose the left hand and say: 'Father, give me this. Pure Truth is for Thee alone.'

Your Loving Father

My Dearest Son Jacob,

Now that I am gone, I am, as promised passing the heirloom ring to the son I love most. This ring has the magical ability to render its owner pleasant in the eyes of God and mankind. Go forth my son and live such that the ring's powers prove true. Live by the religion you have learned from those you respect. Respect other religions, because all contain one spiritual thread, and these threads are always seeking each other, wanting to join. Do not hold those different as Infidels; they too attain salvation. The ways of the ring and providence are infinite. Remember if God held all Truth in his right hand, and in his left, nothing but an ever-restless striving after Truth with the condition of forever erring, and told me to choose, I would reverently choose the left hand and say: 'Father, give me this. Pure Truth is for Thee alone.'

Your Loving Father



My Dearest Son Matthew,

Now that I am gone, I am, as promised passing the heirloom ring to the son I love most. This ring has the magical ability to render its owner pleasant in the eyes of God and mankind. Go forth my son and live such that the ring's powers prove true. Live by the religion you have learned from those you respect. Respect other religions, because all contain one spiritual thread, and these threads are always seeking each other, wanting to join. Do not hold those different as Infidels; they too attain salvation. The ways of the ring and providence are infinite. Remember if God held all Truth in his right hand, and in his left, nothing but an ever-restless striving after Truth with the condition of forever erring, and told me to choose, I would reverently choose the left hand and say: 'Father, give me this. Pure Truth is for Thee alone.'

Your Loving Father

C H R I S T M A S

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Letter 4: You have the answers! The other groups only have 1 ring. Please read this quietly and discuss how you will help them. Remember you can only answer yes or no to their questions.

*... In hoar antiquity there dwelt
In eastern lands a man who had received
From a loved hand a ring of priceless worth.
An opal was the stone it bore, which shot
A hundred fair and varied hues around,
And had the mystic power to render dear
Alike to God and man whoever wore
The ring with perfect faith. What wonder, then,
That eastern man would never lay it off,
And further made a fixed and firm resolve
That it should bide for ever with his race.
For this he left it to his dearest son,
Adding a stringent clause that he in turn
Should leave it to the son he loved the most,
And that in every age the dearest son,
Without respect to seniority,
By virtue of the **ring** alone should be
The lord of all the race ...
And thus the ring came down from sire to son,
Until it reached a father of three sons
Each equally obedient to his will,
And whom accordingly he was constrained
To love alike. And yet from time to time,
Whene'er the one or other chanced to be
Alone with him, and his overflowing heart
Was not divided by the other two,
The one who stood beside him still would seem
Most worthy of the **ring**; and thus it chanced
That he by kindly weakness had been led*

*To promise it in turn to each of them.
This state of matters lasted while it could,
But by-and-by he had to think of death,
And then this worthy sire was sore perplexed.
He could not brook the thought of breaking faith
With two dear sons whom he'd pledged his word;
What now was to be done? He straightway sends
In secret for a skilled artificer,
And charges him to make **two other rings**
Precisely like the first, at any cost.
This the artificer contrives to do.
And when at last he brings him all **three rings**
Even the father can't say which is which.
With joyful heart he summons then his sons,
But singly and apart, bestows on each
His special blessing, and **his ring**--and dies ...
Scarce was the father dead, each several son
Comes with his ring and claims to be the lord
Of all his kindred.*

Lessing's Nathan the Wise:

<http://www.goletapublishing.com/jstamps/o2o2deep.htm>





The Blind Men and the Elephant in Islamic Thought:

http://www.kheper.net/topics/blind_men_and_elephant/Sufi.html

(note - the following is taken from Fritz Meier The Problem of Nature in the Esoteric Monism of Islam For the sake of brevity I have deleted most of the writers commentaries, but retained the translations of the various versions of the story. I can't remember where I photocopied the article from, but it was probably a volume of the Eranos Yearbooks - M.A.K.)

The legend of the Blind Men and the Elephant originated in the Pali Buddhist Udana, which was apparently compiled in the second century b.c.e. It spread to Islam [1] through the work of the orthodox Sufi theologian external link Muhammad al-Ghazzali (1058-1128 c.e.), in his Theology Revived. Ghazzali refers to the tale in a discussion on the problem of human action, a problem in which the inadequacy of natural reason becomes most evident. This is his version [2] of the fable:

A community of blind men once heard that an extraordinary beast called an elephant had been brought into the country. Since they did not know what it looked like and had never heard its name, they resolved to obtain a picture, and the knowledge they desired, by feeling the beast - the only possibility that was open to them! They went in search of the elephant, and when they had found it, they felt its body. One touched its leg, the other a tusk, the third an ear, and in the belief that they now knew the elephant, they returned home. But when they were questioned by the other blind men, their answers differed. The one who had felt the leg maintained that the elephant was nothing other than a pillar, extremely rough to the touch, and yet strangely soft. The one who had caught hold of the tusk denied this and described the elephant as, hard and smooth, with nothing soft or rough about it, more over the beast was by no means as stout as a pillar, but rather had the shape of a post ['amud]. The third, who had held the ear in his hands, spoke: "By my faith, it is both soft and rough." Thus he agreed with one of the others, but went on to say: Nevertheless, it is neither like a post nor a pillar, but like a broad, thick piece of leather." Each was right in a certain sense, since each of them communicated that part of the elephant he had comprehended, but none was able describe the elephant as it really was; for all three of them were unable to comprehend the entire form of the elephant.

The legend was also used by the Persian poet Sana'i (died probably 545 a.h./1150 c.e.), also as an illustration of the inadequacy of human reason.

The great Sufi master Jalal ud-din-i Rumi (1207-1273 c.e.) is another who uses the story [5]; in his Mathnawi. He likens those who cannot agree about the eternally immutable God, those in whom the spiritual eye has not yet awakened, to a group of people who seek an elephant in a dark room, and try to determine its appearance by touch alone. Naturally, each one comes to a different conclusion, according to the part of the animal's body that they feel.

The elephant was in a dark house; some Hindus had brought it for exhibition.

In order to see it, many people were going, every one, into that darkness.

As seeing it with the eye was impossible, [each one] was feeling it in the dark with the palm of his hand..

The hand of one fell on its trunk; he said: "This creature is like a water-pipe."

The hand of another touched its ear: to him it appeared to be like a fan.

Since another handled its leg, he said: "I found the elephant's shape to be like a pillar."

Another laid his hand on its back: he said, "Truly, this elephant was like a throne."

Similarly, whenever anyone heard [a description of the elephant]. he understood [it only in respect of] the part that he had touched.

On account of the [diverse] place [object] of view, their statements differed: one man titled it "dal [3]," another "alif."

If there had been a candle in each one's hand, the difference would have gone out of their words.

The Persian mystic and philosopher `Aziz ibn-Muhammad-I Nasafi (7th century a.h./13th century c.e.) was yet another profound thinker who made reference to this parable, this time in the context of criticism of exoteric theologians. According to Nasafi, these theologians have grasped only a part of the object of their study, but claim this part represents the whole. Since the whole consists of different parts, the result is bound to be false and one-sided; and hence each contradicts the others. The battle of theological opinions can only be arbitrated only by one who knows the relation between the parts, that is, the esoteric seer who has preserved or acquired an ability to see the whole. In this context, Nasafi tells the legend [4] of the blind men and the elephant. The blind men symbolize the theologians and exoteric thinkers, the elephant represents God or the truth:

Once there was a city, the inhabitants of which were all blind. They had heard of elephants and were curious to see [sic] one face to face. They were still full of this desire when one day a caravan arrived and camped outside the city. There was an elephant in the caravan. When the inhabitants of the city heard there was an elephant in the caravan, the wisest and most intelligent men of the city decided to go out and see the elephant. A number of them left the city and went to the place where the elephant was. One stretched out his hands, grasped the elephant's ear, and perceived something resembling a shield. This man decided that the elephant looked like a shield. Another stretched out his hands, grasped the elephant's trunk, and perceived something resembling a club ['amud]. This man decided that the elephant looked like a club. A third stretched out his hands, grasped the elephant's leg, and perceived something like a pillar [imad]. He decided that the elephant looked like a pillar. A fourth stretched his hands, grasped the elephant's back, and perceived something like a seat [takht]. He decided that the elephant looked like a seat. Delighted, they all returned to the city. After one had gone back to his quarter, the people asked: "Did you see the elephant?" Each one answered yes. They asked: "What does he look like? What kind of shape has he?" Then one in his quarter replied: "The elephant looks like a shield. And the second man in the second quarter: "The elephant looks like a club." The third man in the third quarter: "The elephant looks like a pillar." And the fourth man in fourth quarter: "The elephant looks like a seat." And inhabitants of each quarter formed their opinion in accord; with what they had heard.

Now when the different conceptions came into contact with one another, it became evident that they were contradictory. Each blind man found fault with the next, and began to advance proofs in support of his own view and in confutation of the views of the others. They called these proofs rational and scriptural proofs. One said: "It is written in war the elephant is sent out ahead of the army. Consequently the elephant must be a kind of shield." The second said: "It is written that in war the elephant hurls himself at the hostile army and that the hostile army is thereby shattered. Consequently the elephant must be a kind of club." The third said: "It is written that the elephant carries a weight thousand men and more without effort. Consequently the elephant must be a kind of pillar." The fourth said: "It is written that so and so many people can sit in comfort on an elephant. Consequently the elephant must be a kind of seat."

Now you yourself consider whether such proofs they can ever penetrate to the object of demonstrations, the elephant, and whether with such proofs they can ever arrive at the correct conclusion. Every rational man knows that the more proofs of this sort they advance, the farther they will be from knowledge of the elephant they can never arrive at the object of their demonstrations, the elephant, and consequently that the conflict in opinions will never be relieved, but will become more and more pronounced.

But know this: Suppose by the grace of God one of them is made seeing so that he perceives and knows the elephant as it really is, and says to them: "In what you have said of the elephant, you have indeed grasped some aspect of the elephant, but you do not know the rest. God has given me sight, I have seen and come to know the elephant as it really is." They will not even believe the seeing man, but will say: "You claim that God has given you sight, but that is only your imagination. Your brain is defective, and madness assails you. It is we who are the seeing." Only some few accept the word of the seer, for it is written in the Koran: "But few of my servants are the thankful" [Sura 34:13]. The others persist in their stupidity coupled with arrogance, refuse to be instructed, and call those among them who hear and accept the word of the seer, and who agree with the seer, unbelievers and heretics. But this only shows that "to hear about a thing is not the same as to see it for yourself."