

Introduction to 'The Whole Elephant'

from the book 'The Whole Elephant' by Marja de Vries, published in Dutch as 'De Hele Olifant in Beeld' by Ankh-Hermes bv, Deventer, The Netherlands © 2007, Marja de Vries;

translation from dutch into english by Veronica Verkaik

To try to live without understanding the Universal Laws is like your trying to drive a car without knowing how to control it. The results can be disastrous even though you may be trying hard to drive correctly. Likewise, if you do not understand the Universal Laws by which your life operates, you can end up in difficulty, chaos, pain, and confusion without understanding the reasons.

Bruce McArthur – 1993 ¹

The story of the blind people and the elephant

"Beyond Ghor there was a city. All its inhabitants were blind. A king with his entourage arrived near by; he brought his army and camped in the desert. He had a mighty elephant, which he used in attack and to increase the people's awe.

"The populace became anxious to see the elephant, and some sightless from among this blind community ran like fools to find it. As they did not even know the form or shape of the elephant, they groped sightlessly, gathering information by touching some part of it. Each thought that he knew something, because he could feel a part.

"When they returned to their fellow citizens, eager groups clustered around them. Each of these was anxious, misguidedly, to learn the truth from those who were themselves astray.

"They asked about the form, the shape of the elephant and listened to all that they were told. The man whose hand had reached an ear was asked about the elephant's nature. He said: 'It is a large, rough thing, wide and broad, like a rug.' And the one who had felt the trunk said: 'I have the real facts about it. It is like a straight and hollow pipe, awful and destructive.' The one who had felt its feet and legs said: 'It is mighty and firm, like a pillar.'

"Each had felt one part out of many. Each had perceived it wrongly. No mind knew all. (...) All imagined something, something incorrect."

This story, which illustrates that each person had understood something about the elephant but that nobody had completely understood the whole elephant, is a well-known Sufi story dating from the 12th century². Unlike the blind people in the story, we know what an elephant looks like. This is why it is easy for us to understand that if the blind people were to combine their observations, like different parts of a puzzle making up the greater whole, they would be more likely to gain a picture of 'the whole elephant'.

The many different parts of a puzzle

This book does not present a theory or a philosophy in the modern sense of the word. Instead, it presents an insight into the common Universal Truth which is at the foundation of all the mystical and religious traditions as well as the scientific understandings that seem to confirm this truth. The essence of this Universal Truth concerns a perception of the underlying universal laws that are at the foundation of the nature, the meaning and the operation of the universe as a whole.

Just as it was impossible for each of the blind people to perceive something as large as an elephant in one go and to form a picture for themselves of 'the elephant as a whole', for us, too, it is hardly feasible to gain a comprehensive view of the dynamics within the universe and to achieve an understanding of the whole at one go. All the different

descriptions that we find in the various wisdom traditions are in fact all pieces of that same whole. In other words, each tradition describes an insight into the greater whole from a slightly different perspective. Just like the blind people, we too have a greater chance of gaining a perception of the underlying patterns of the universe as a whole if we place the observations seen from these different perspectives alongside each other.

What prompted me to go in search of these underlying patterns was a need for a new form of learning and education better suited to present-day children and more in tune with the needs of this day and age. My main purpose was the creation of a situation in which children are given the opportunity to develop their full potential. I was searching for a form of learning that corresponded more closely to who we in essence are and that was also more in harmony with the world around us. To be able to achieve this I was looking for fundamental principles with general applicability and therefore of a universal nature, without being colored by a specific belief system, culture or period. Such universal underlying premises might serve as a basis for fruitful, creative innovations in public education all over the world.

A well-founded perception of the universal principles

This decision triggered a whole chain of events. During the course of my search, I came across sources stating that the many different mystical and religious traditions throughout the world all in essence have their roots in the same common Universal Truth. It was stated that these common insights related to a limited number of relatively simple universal principles underlying the nature, the meaning and the workings of the universe. If that were the case, I reasoned, would I be able to discover the basic perceptions in these laws in all these various spiritual movements, beliefs and cultures? I determined to investigate this and I suspected that if I – like the blind people in the story – were to place the many seemingly divergent perceptions originating from entirely different wisdom traditions alongside each other like parts of a puzzle, I would be more likely to gain a picture of the greater whole.

This book is in the first place the result of this puzzle: I did indeed discover the same universal laws in all these traditions, under many different names and terminologies. Although the emphases in the various different traditions differ, the essence turns out to be the same. Seen from the perspective of the greater whole, the complex dynamics of the universe suddenly seem far simpler. In this way, it becomes reasonable to suppose that only a limited number of universal laws are at the foundation of the harmony and the dynamic equilibrium of the universe.

My next thought was that if this were indeed the case and if Western science is also essentially seeking to discover the truth, then it, too, must also encounter these universal laws at some point. I resolved to investigate this as well. This book demonstrates to what degree this is the case at the present moment. While a book of this nature is obviously never finished, the result is a clear, documented insight into the workings of universal laws on the basis of this synthesis.

A whole new worldview

Because these underlying patterns are of a universal nature, they operate in the same way everywhere and are therefore applicable in widely ranging fields. They operate in the natural world around us and they apply to all aspects of our individual and social life. Once we succeed in recognizing these dynamic laws, we will also discover that the many different aspects of ourselves and of the world around us fall into place like parts of a puzzle.

Once we have gained a rough outline of 'the whole elephant' – in other words an insight into the operation of the greater whole – we can use this time and time again to establish whether a given phenomenon is or isn't in accordance and therefore in harmony with the underlying laws and the dynamic equilibrium of the greater whole. It will then be apparent that the reason why something really 'works' is that the operating procedure or method is in all probability in line with the underlying universal laws.

In addition, an understanding of the operation of these universal laws in fact unveils a whole new world view. This new perspective reveals that we are a part of a larger whole,

a multidimensional universe, where everything traces its origins back to the same Source, everything is interconnected, everything consists in essence of energy and is in resonance, everything is permanently in a process of change, organizing itself in dynamic balance and permanently in a process of development. This can also serve as a basis to clarify where our culture is and is not in line with these laws. This will enable us to understand what is necessary to be able to restore the balance in ourselves and to understand how we can shift the balance to contribute to a more optimal equilibrium of the whole. Because we have a free will, we have the choice of consciously applying these understandings both in our personal lives and our social activities. In short, the result of this synthesis provides a common basis capable of being used as starting point in all the transformations in our personal as well as our social lives, which aim at a greater harmony with ourselves and with the greater whole. Furthermore, this understanding gives clarity as to what is required for optimal development of our consciousness at this particular moment in the history of humanity.

This book is an attempt to go beyond 'opinions', 'proof' and 'belief'. It is an invitation to the reader to adopt an open mind and look upon everything as a possibility. The best way of forming one's own, grounded view is to investigate this for oneself and to arrive at one's own conclusions based on ones' own experiences or by being in contact with one's own 'inner knowing'. While reading this book, many readers will realize that these perceptions are not at all new, but that deep within themselves they have in fact always been aware of these patterns, without necessarily being able to put them properly into words.

© 2007, Marja de Vries

¹ Quotation from Bruce McArthur, *Your Life: Understanding the Universal Laws*, (1993), p. 4.

² Taken from Idries Shah, *Tales of the Dervishes, Teachings of the Sufi Masters over the Past Thoudsand Years*, 1970/1993, Penguin Compass, New York , p.25-26.