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Topic: Fear or Connections

Seeing My Reflection

Share the Lion sees his reflection in a pool and gasps at the fierce creature staring back at him. Though very thirsty, he's too frightened to drink. All the animals in the jungle are afraid of Share as he says only "Grrrrr", which is how lions talk. In this illustrated children's version of The Lion Who Saw Himself in The Water, an ancient Sufi Teaching-Story, a butterfly later whispers in Share's ear. "Don't be silly, Share The Lion, that is only your reflection staring back at you." But Share rejects her explanation. "I know what I see," Share retorts. He returns to the pool several times, with the same result. Share, overcome with thirst, declares, "I don't care if there is another lion staring back at me. I am so thirsty, I must have a drink." And, as he puts his head into the cool water, the "other" lion disappears.

The notion of **my** dying is **my** fierce creature staring back from a pool of water. I can't comprehend the concept of being absent. My "butterfly" continuously whispers. Like Share, I don't believe her. My fear is entwined with an insatiable desire to comprehend, to KNOW what happens, upon leaving this earthly domain. (One can be greedy for spirituality too, can't one?)

I understand that virtually all human institutions are built on the premises of promise of reward and fear of punishment. Maneuvering around this fault line is no easy task.

I'm too practical to follow the oogah-boogah of self-proclaimed gurus. While religion gives me emotional solace and identity, my sense is that religions have lost the ability to teach beyond the narrow spectra of emotion, charity, and sustaining community. I'm wary of the hocus-pocus of cults offering hypnotic pap: foreign garb, vainglorious exotic names, fetishistic idols, and entertainment-

industry caliber ritual that are rampant in this Western desert of genuine spiritual practice. ("The Mouse and The Elephant**" story warns of the foolishness of choosing a charlatan teaching: "Oh my, I have traded one moment of pleasure and tons of imagination for a lifetime of digging a grave," realizes the mouse, when her elephant husband keels over and dies on their wedding night. But, I do believe there are many authentic paths to real knowledge.

In the mid-1960's, I began examining Idries Shah's writings and participating in a study-group. I sensed the Work is genuine. ("False coin is accepted because real gold exists.**") I hoped I'd chosen an undiluted Way - to learn how to learn, and know how to know.

I continue my involvement with the Institute for The Study of Human Knowledge (ISHK) and its many projects and studying Shah's writings. My expectations of what is a spiritual path have dramatically changed. ("I'm here to clear away the brushwood," Shah writes.) The Work requires much from me. In writing the free-to-the-public Hoopoe Books curricula guides and activities, including Lion, I've contributed somewhat, but gained much more. I've needed to intensely study the Teaching-Stories and experience them on the deepest levels.

Will this motivating force of fear of dying be superseded by real knowledge? Trepidation is the great catalyst that brought me here. But, what I've found gives me more than just salve to nurse my uncertainty.

Will I absorb the lion's lesson?

Because of the inadequacy of language, some ideas are best conveyed analogically.

When Share lifts his head out of the water he tells the other animals, who now can understand him, "At last I have learned that a reflection is not the same as the real thing."

* The Commanding Self by Idries Shah

** The Sufis by Idries Shah