

**May 6, 1984**

A few weeks ago when I was visiting Friends Meetings on the island of Jamaica, a little girl who is a member of one of the families who offered me home hospitality asked me to read her a bedtime story. She brought me a book entitled "The Shaggy, Baggy Elephant." The story told of a baby elephant wandering alone in the forest who became worried because his hide was baggy and wrinkled. He asked a monkey how he managed to have such tight skin. The monkey explained that because he swung in the trees he got lots of exercise and this kept his skin taut. So, the shaggy, baggy little elephant expended much energy swinging around in the trees, a very unnatural act for him, and even though he did this to the limit of his endurance it was to no avail. The little elephant then spied a hippopotamus which, although it was very fat, had very smooth, tight skin. He asked the hippopotamus how he avoided having sags and wrinkles. The hippopotamus explained that because he sat in the water all day his skin shrank and became smooth and tight. And so, for many, many days, the shaggy, baggy elephant soaked himself in water, but that too proved to be of no avail.

Finally, the baby elephant met a herd of adult elephants, and when he saw how big and beautiful they were with their shaggy, baggy hides, he was filled with joy and lived with them happily every after.

There is a Hindu parable about a pregnant tiger which, one day when seeking dinner, attacked a herd of goats. As she charged she accidentally hit a rock and was killed. However, being close to term, her cub was born anyway, and this orphaned tiger cub took his place in the herd of goats. The goats raised him as one of their own, teaching him how to bleat and how to eat grass. Indeed, the little tiger cub assumed he was a goat.

One day another tiger seeking a meal charged the herd of goats. The young tiger who thought he was a goat felt no fear, for some reason he could not explain, and he stood fast as the herd of goats fled in panic. And as the charging tiger went past the cub, the cub let out a bleating sound at it. The tiger was so stunned by this that he forgot about dinner, turned to the cub who had bleated at him, and said, "What is wrong with you! You shouldn't be making sounds like that. Don't you know you are a tiger?" With that he grabbed the young tiger by the scruff of the neck and brought him to a pool where he could see his reflection. As he saw his image, he let out his first roar, a roar of joy and recognition, and he lived happily ever after, chasing and eating goats.

I do not know exactly why a vegetarian religion has a parable like this, but there it is.

The little girl's bedtime story, and this ancient Hindu parable, both came to mind when I saw the newly released film about Tarzan. For here we have the development of a very similar idea. A human child—indeed, the child is actually the heir to an English peerage—is orphaned in the jungle when only a few weeks old. He is brought up by apes, thinking he is an ape. He makes the same sounds that apes make and lives as they do in every respect.

One wonders, as Tarzan lives in this fashion year after year, if there are not moments when he is alone in the silence of the forest, when perhaps the mental accouter-

ments of apedom might fall away, and he might get a glimmering from some deep and pure inner principle that something is not quite right; indeed, that something is very terribly wrong. If this happens, the film does not disclose it. Ultimately, however, after many years and when he is already a young adult, Tarzan is rescued from the jungle and brought back to the great manor which is his birthright as an English Lord.

Now most of us might fantasize that if we were plucked from our present condition of life and ensconced in a stately home of this sort we would have the same kind of joyful and instantaneous recognition that the tiger cub experienced: "Yes, of course, this is where I belong!" But with Tarzan this does not occur. Indeed, his accommodation with human society is only a very tentative and uneasy one. He is inclined to careen around the parapets of his great manor house in the moonlight, and to give vent to odd jungle sounds when he is trying to dine with the other lords and ladies. Ultimately, after a series of misadventures, Tarzan gives up on human society and returns to his life in the jungle.

Are we not all Tarzans? Are we not all afflicted with the same problem that he faced? Being raised in a kind of jungle, are we not estranged from our own true nature? And is it possible that whole populations of people, acclimated to a way of life in which there is neither wisdom nor goodness, can nevertheless be completely satisfied with themselves as they are? And if the disordered environment in which we are raised up warps and disguises human nature as it really is meant to be, how do we succeed in self-realization where Tarzan failed? How do we determine our real nature and destiny, and how do we learn to give expression to it?

Certainly, our practice of becoming silent inwardly is the beginning. For as gradually we learn to release from our minds and hearts the cacophony of coarse sounds borrowed from a world fallen far from right ordering, we begin to get a glimmering that there is buried underneath all this our true nature. We begin to experience ourselves as creatures in whom there is something which corresponds to the highest principles of truth in the universe.

Secondly, we have here in the Religious Society of Friends a spiritual community, a place where we can move beyond the world and the world's way of doing things, a place where our true nature can be affirmed, a place where we can practice giving expression to it, a place from which we can return to the world to live in it in a new and different way.

And thirdly, we have our great teachers who show us the way—people like Socrates, Moses, Jesus, Buddha and Lao Tzu. Their spiritual wisdom was not so much something they knew, but something they were, a quality of their being. They were what we can and should be. Quarreling about the philosophical garb in which these perfect manifestations came clothed is entirely to miss the point of what their true significance is for us. For what they really do is exhibit to us our authentic humanity, and the recognition they strike in us is so profound that it reverberates through centuries overgrown with jungles, transmitting a fine, fine energy which summons each of us, again and again, to find his own true self.