

The Leopards in the Temple A Parable by Franz Kafka

Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes a part of the ceremony.ⁱ

Kafka's parable about the leopards suggests how we can adapt our meditation practice to include whatever comes up during meditation, which can be as frightening as wild leopards breaking into the temple. A skillful way to proceed is to widen the scope of our awareness to include the new experience rather than to build a wall that keeps the new experience outside the scope of our awareness.

Kafka's parable about the leopards is related to a major theme of my book, *Blinding Pain, Simple Truth*. This theme is the connection between conceptual thinking and paradigms or conceptual lenses. A paradigm is a set of assumptions, values, practices, beliefs, meanings, and self-images representing a way of interpreting experiences and life. The fundamental role of conceptual lenses in structuring our view of reality is a basic tenet of cognitive science.

We have learned that there are certain mechanisms of thought that structure our reality. What this means is that you don't see reality as it is. That's impossible from the point of view of cognitive science. You are always imposing a structure on reality; there's no way you could do otherwise given the nature of your brain and body.ⁱⁱ

Kafka's leopards break into the temple when an event occurs or a discovery is made that cannot be explained by the accepted paradigm. One must adapt either by altering the accepted paradigm or, if the event or discovery is too radical, by adopting a new paradigm. "Finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes a part of the ceremony." The paradigm shifts, the event or discovery fits into the new scheme, a different conceptual universe is born, and the leopards break into the temple again.

i. Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 93.

ii. "Change the Frame, Change the Picture: A Conversation with George Lakoff," *Inquiring Mind*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Spring 2005, p. 6.