



# The Philosophy of Tiger Splash™

By Dean Harrison

“Are you ready for this?” the emcee blurted! The crowd roared back, “Yes!” Two men and a woman sprinted toward the pool. Akasha, a Bengal tigress, spontaneously bolted after the closest one. As the man dove headlong into the clear water, Akasha leapt into the air after him, mouth open. They both disappeared under the surface. A few long, tense moments passed; then the water broke. The man’s arms, head, and shoulders appeared first, but then came the tiger, emerging in front of him. The tiger’s forelegs wrapped around the man, who had just enough time to catch his breath.

The other man and woman had also splashed into the pool and were surrounding the tiger, which began nuzzling her “victim” about the head and neck. The audience hushed silent –stunned – breathless.

“Akasha, let him go. Good tiger, good tiger.” The man on the right uttered quietly. Akasha released Shawn gently, who smiled at the audience and was completely unharmed. The crowd breathed. Tiger Splash™ had begun as it does every day at 1:15 p.m. at Out of Africa Wildlife Park in Camp Verde, Arizona.

Within a minute, Nick began running across the grass in front of the 2,000 seat arena, filled with anticipating park guests. Liberty, another 400-pound Bengal tigress, predatorily rocketed after him in determined pursuit. She overtook Nick, who had turned to receive her attack from behind. The two collided, angling to the turf, both sliding like football players, the tiger on top. Again, the onlookers gasped in stunned suspense. Rusty, the “Professor of Tiger Economics,” hurled a small piece of meat to Natalie, who had arrived near the collision site. She dropped a morsel of meat in front of Liberty. When the tiger saw it, she sprung off her prey, now scampering to his feet unharmed. Relief fell over the onlookers. Now relaxed and believing that we may know what we’re doing after all, the crowd applauded and cheered.

“Is this exciting?” the emcee asked. “Yes!” screamed the amazed spectators.

Prayeri, my wife, and I, along with staff members, began doing the Tiger Splash™ program in 1993 because of a young tiger named Genesis. That commenced what would become the principle attraction at the park. Genesis was born with a disease called hypertrophic osteodystrophy, normally a terminal illness which causes the bones to be malformed. After three extensive surgeries by an unusual veterinary surgeon, and by seemingly alchemic work by a holistic veterinarian who cured him of the disease, the surgeon suggested that we provide the young tiger with a physical therapy pool. Thanks to skills of the good doctor, Genesis now had repositioned kneecaps and it was time to exercise his legs. The pool seemed logical enough. However, instead of building a small pool, I decided to build a 50 by 30 foot swimming pool with sloping ends to a depth of 4½ feet in the middle, which allowed us to stand while the animals still had to swim.

The other tigers loved it. Even the wolves, bears, and hyenas have frolicked in it, but Genesis never used it. At least he did lay in a small version of it that was built just for him.

For Tiger Splash™ to be a “show,” we had to construct an arena for public viewing around the swimming pool and develop a natural behavior show that triggers instincts, intellect, and feelings. We began using colorful toys, especially animated commercial pool toys, stuffed animals with balloons inside in place of the stuffing, basket balls, shoes, even clothes and trash bags filled with balloons that explode when a tiger hits them in mid-air. The program is spontaneous; no two shows are alike. We do no training of any animal. Instead we develop a relationship with each one. We apply “principles of survival,” which correspond to natural instincts. There are four primal instincts that are behavioral motivators – self preservation, food, territory, and being part of something greater than oneself (ex: marriage and family relations). These are the four fundamental objectives in a life, both theirs and ours.

The instinct of marriage and family relations is how we begin our walk on the wild side. It directs us automatically not to be alone, to be part of something greater than ourselves. A corollary instinct subconsciously lets us know not to hurt our friends or we will be alone, and we cannot stand to be alone. These instinctual feelings are in us and in them. This is our area of common ground, the point at which we can choose to come together.

We then combine these first source motivators with supportive instincts, which are the procedures to obtain the four objectives. The ones we use in Tiger Splash™ are seasonal change, possession, protection, play (*the most important*), chase, to take advantage, holding and biting, and exploration and adventure.

These are the major instinctual programs found in predator and prey animals, less one – courtship, which does not provoke itself in the show. All four primal instincts and nine supportive instincts are found in endothermic (heat producing) animals, including us. In exothermic animals, the play instinct doesn't exist. Snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodilians, and amphibians don't play. Flesh eaters of these groups have a hunting instinct. In large cats, the foundation for hunting is actually the play instinct, which combines with several secondary instincts to achieve food satisfaction.

In order to achieve successful capture of prey or toys, large cats must think. They must conceive, judge, expect, resolve, conclude, and recall, all of which are demonstrated naturally during Tiger Splash™. These six actions are choices, decisions that need to be made with regard to another's response or decision, which vary according to circumstances. Without the use of these concepts, these thoughtful capacities to modify instinctual behavior, many lives would be shortened or lost. They progress from recognition to habit, thus working hand-in-hand with instincts towards a more successful outcome.

We also evoke feelings or emotions in the animals during the show. Feelings are subjective, pleasant or unpleasant, physical or mental. In other words, they manifest personal likes and dislikes, physical or psychological. They have their roots in the four primal instincts. Feelings are the glue between all living beings. Good feelings are good relationships. Good relationships with animals (or people) are cemented

and enhanced through the instinct of play. Play is the way to our hearts. Those who play together, stay together. To do this well, we must know and practice the natural “principals of nature,” so we demonstrate respect for each other and ourselves. Survival principals are observable and speak of lessons found in important occurrences.

For example, it would be wise to emulate those who are successful in the hunt for life. (It is easier to follow than to lead). When youngsters imitate their parents, they’re learning by example. The parent squirrel teaches the youngster how to forage for food. If the neonate watches because it is naturally motivated by hunger, then it quickly learns strategies for satisfying its need.

Another example would be if a lioness becomes encircled by a clan of hyenas but narrowly escapes. She’ll do well to adjust her behavior so when she sees the signs of entrapment again, she can decided to exit sooner. Sometimes the worst circumstances provide the best lessons. I have outlined many of these principles in the book *Return to Eden*, available online through the website and at the park gift store. The book also gives the history of how the park began.

It all started in 1983 with Saja, a leopard that Prayeri and I brought into our home. We have never been the same. The animals have taught us their ways, and we have taught many people who have experienced relationships that they never expected. We have learned to flow with the animal’s nature, to “see” from the subconscious mind, not just the conscious. You know the one, the one that says “I knew it!” It’s the one that presents us with a feeling about something that hasn’t yet happened; it’s the woman’s intuition or a guy’s gut feeling, knowing without external proof. It is the real, original voice deep inside that quietly suggests to us who we really are and why we are here. Through attentive observation of the animals, we have learned to be adult children, to live in the moment, not to hold grudges or worry or imagine about what may or may not come. Through them we have learned about God and our natural unifying design of oneness with each other. They have taught us about our conscious morality, which they do not possess, and because of that, are never guilty. They have no knowledge of what we call a crime or morality, that is, the knowledge of good and evil. They are innocent and they are wild and they are free. They are one with their Maker. That is why we love them. We are all one.

Through the years we have recorded our many, sometimes dangerous experiences. The philosophy that we now exercise is a composition of natural behaviors that we have acquired in four stages: learning, understanding, knowing, and finally, becoming. It is useful not only in dealing with felines, but with other animals, including but not limited to bears, wolves, giraffe, antelope, zebra, birds, and reptiles...even cobras and rattlesnakes.

We discovered animals are very much like us in their reactions to what they encounter in their lives. They are also different from us because they rely more heavily on the contents of the subconscious mind, where instinctual programs wait quietly to be triggered for a natural body survival response, then repose again until they are retrieved by the six senses for the next event. They don’t think as much or as deeply as we do, but their bottom line is peace, while ours has become turmoil.

Through the consideration of behavioral categories, and principles that govern natural respect, we can view the possibility of living together with the animals of our planet, even each other. To this end, we see our challenge, our hope for peace in mind and body, our reunion with ourselves, animals, and God.

To learn more about Out of Africa Wildlife Park, visit our website at [www.outofafricapark.com](http://www.outofafricapark.com), or call us at 928-567-2840. You will see we have many species of animals roaming the 104-acre mountainous preserve. If you visit, you'll experience a realistic safari tour narrated by expert guides. By the way, the Grizzly Show in the Tiger Splash™ Arena is only done at 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Come early because it takes all day to see the park. We're open year round, 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., closed only Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. We're located 90 miles north of Phoenix on I-17, 3 miles west toward Cottonwood. Just follow the signs. See you here.

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