

# Out of Africa - What Mindless Habits get you into Trouble?

On our recent trip to the Okavango Delta in Botswana, we had a guide called Coca, who knew wildlife better than any guide I have ever encountered.... and he had a marvelous sense of humor about the animals and human nature.

One morning he pointed out to us a track leading down to the river and commented, "Hippo Highway." We looked at him enquiringly, knowing there was more to come. "You can see there are two tracks because hippos do not cross over their legs. Their left front leg and their left back leg go in the same track and their right front leg and back leg go on the other track - and every day they go the same way. They are very stupid! And you will ask me now, 'How is the hippo very stupid?' So I will tell you how the hippo is very stupid.

If you always go along the same track then you can easily get caught. The fisherman will dig a deep hole in the middle of his highway and cover it with sticks and leaves and then the hippo that always goes the same way and doesn't see very well, falls into the pit. Now it is very easy for the fisherman to kill him and cut him up in the pit."

It was a rather grizzly picture he painted and I felt a pang of sorrow for the stupid hippo, who was caught, not so much by the fishermen's cleverness, but by his own mindless and habitual nature.

And I thought of how we are not that different. We tend to go along the same path in life and as long as it is comfortable and meets our short term needs we seldom pause to consider whether it is leading us to long term destruction or to a well examined and creative, aware life. We have habitual thought patterns of judgement of ourselves and others,

unexamined opinions about all kinds of things; we engage in addictive behaviors of drinking, over eating, over spending, overindulging. We fall into the same old ways of feeling and complaining. We give in to repetitive compulsions and needs without thinking about the pitfalls of our patterned thinking, feeling and behaving - we just follow the deeply rutted grooves of our customary way of walking to the watering hole or to the patch of grazing that satisfies our immediate cravings.



Coca's story had the flavor of an Aesop's fable and with the same effect - it woke me up a little to consider of which patterns I need to get aware and how I can change course in the new year, risk another path, find a different direction instead of sticking to the same old ways of doing business, and especially those that lead to a deep pit! And so I commit to noticing the well worn byways of my mind along which I trudge mindlessly, examine them carefully for pitfalls, and redirect my energies to a new way of thinking and being in the world.