

# Out of Africa - Chameleon



Apart from the mock hissing and attempted roaring that chameleons make when you pick them up, they could not be less like lions, even though their name means ‘Earth Lion.’

The ones I collected as a child lived a lurking existence in bushes and trees where they would sit dead still for long periods of time, the pigment of their skin adapting to their environment, camouflaging them from predators. They would move cautiously and very slowly, their round bodies kind of wobbling on the thin spindly little legs that clutched the branch. As they crept forward they would lift one foot, pausing to gain their balance, move it forward to grasp the branch and then, after a pause, lift the next foot, all the time scanning their environment with their rotating eyes - each one spinning slowly around, 360 degrees, in different directions. The chameleon gets agitated, stressed and very anxious in the presence of other chameleons, as if it doesn’t quite know how to relate. Chameleons although they belong to the lizard family, do not have the speed of their cousins. Their legs barely seem able to support them, and so they have to rely on other survival skills.

How like chameleons we often are - when we struggle to stand on our own two feet, stand up for ourselves, take a stand, put our foot down ... it is as if our legs will not support us when we are required to show ourselves, be intimate, share, speak up for what we want, who we are and what we stand for, say no to being used or treated disrespectfully.... We wobble precariously, scan our environment, move slowly if at all, procrastinate and try to camouflage who we are.

One of the ways we hide is to be super-vigilant of other people’s feelings, needs, perceptions, ideas so that we can adapt and be agreeable, meet their needs, anticipate their wants, take care of their feelings. In so doing we render ourselves invisible and live with the illusion that we are safe from conflict, disagreement, anger, judgment or blame. We compromise our identity and our values for the sake of safety.

Legs and feet are the parts of the body that physically move and carry us forward on our journey through life. When we are not, metaphorically speaking, moving forward our language reflects the mental/emotional problem that is keeping us stuck in a paralyzed or at best creeping position.

Are we dancing through life, free and wild? Or are we feeling shackled? Are we teeter tottering on the high heels of cultural expectation and norms? Do we always toe the line of unreasonable demands or get weak at the knees? Are we able to take a stand, stand firm in our convictions, know what we stand for and why?

What are the fears and beliefs that keep you from standing up, confidently and moving forward in your life? Make a list of the sayings in the language to do with feet and legs, examine what they are telling you about yourself so that you can evolve from a chameleon like existence to that of a proud lion that rules the savannah, kneels before no master and whose roar matches it’s integrity, wildness and freedom from fear.

