

Out of Africa – the Spider



I grew up in Zimbabwe, which has several hundred species of spiders – some of them, dangerous to humans. Most of my time as a child was spent in the veld or the garden where it was imperative to be alert and attentive to the animals, reptiles, insects and spiders for which one should have a healthy respect.

Spiders are particularly intriguing. Their venom can either affect the neural system or cause damage to tissue at the place of the bite. Some are perfectly harmless and make intriguing pets. It is important to know the difference. Sometimes the most seemingly intimidating are really quite harmless to humans, like the big hairy tarantulas, and some are deadly like the tiny, pretty black widow spider. But most intriguing are the ones that spin elaborate, elegant silk webs – perfect mandalas of incredible strength and beauty, glistening in the sunlight. On a cool summer morning when the underbrush was still dewy I would watch how little insects would fly into the web and find themselves trapped on the sticky substance on the web. The spider would then rush out to devour it – and not get stuck in it's own web! How amazing! The trick is that the spokes of the web are not covered in sticky glandular secretions – only the parts going around and around do – but only the spider knows this.

It occurs to me that the spider's web is exactly the right metaphor for the intricate complexity of beliefs and thoughts that are woven into our psyche through the socialization process. The neural patterns and pathways are just like the strands of a web that go round and round and round. They are sticky and we get trapped in them just like little flies in the spider's web. The endless karmic patterns that result in us going in circles.... all the ideas of worthlessness, inadequacy, helplessness resulting in us feeling paralyzed and caught in the sticky, icky substance called shame, which then leads to sabotaging behaviors that further confirm the original belief of worthlessness.

The thing is, we did not develop these ideas by ourselves – the spider (the socializing agencies of our lives) spun the web and we got stuck in it.... and if we do not get free we are devoured by the spider. Everyday I speak to people who are being devoured by the corporate greed of big organizations, by the demands of tyrannical family members, used by so called friends and lovers, and yet they cannot get free because they are stuck in beliefs and fears of being selfish, bad, unloving, unkind....and they believe that unless they submit and are food for the spider.... whether the judgments of other people or their own self judgments.

So how to get free? It is not easy – it requires recognition of the cycle of thoughts and feelings in which we are stuck. It requires the struggle to stay aware of sticky thoughts and relaxation to get off of the strand that goes round and round, so as to escape on to a thread that is not sticky and goes to the center.

The strands that get us to the center and to freedom from the web of life are straight and true; they do not result in repetitive patterns and cycles of misery.

Consider some of the sticky repetitive cycles of your life that keep you victimized... What do you believe about yourself? How do these beliefs victimize and shame you? How does fear and shame prevent you from living freely and abundantly? What venomous self-sabotaging beliefs paralyze you and tie you in knots? How did you develop them? What life experiences taught you to doubt yourself, criticize yourself, deny yourself? What circumstances reduce you to feeling little, trapped and helpless? What inner struggles leave you worn out and depleted?

What strands of belief about the world and yourself are not sticky and get you to the center of your being? Because it is at the center of your own being that you will discover the truth of your intrinsic nature that is always loving and accepting, gracious and at peace, - a place from which you are free to fly and soar.