

Teachers

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every habitat in the world.” (If you haven’t seen one, watch one of the amazing videos online — better yet, go outside).

I decided to test the little creature to see how much “jump” she had. Holding my sleeve 3-4 inches from the railing I quickly calculated it was about 10 times the length of the spider’s body. She leapt over with ease. At about 20 lengths, she missed. Her invisible thread bungeed her back to the railing. Then she came back for more.

These little hoppers are very inquisitive, which brings me to another level of meditation — maybe the tiniest, almost imperceptible level of contemplation. I’ll mention another little critter to illustrate.

Some people in these parts complain when the “stink bugs” arrive each year. When a friend posted a picture with the caption “They’re Back!,” I responded by saying we call them “curiosity bugs” and they only stink when smashed. Funny humans.

Carol and I watch these things walk up and down and around and around tables and curtains. Entomologists tell us they are looking for mates, places to lay eggs or searching for food. No doubt that’s true. But I also think they’re simply wandering and wondering what’s up there, down there, across there.

Just like the jumping spiders. As I move my hand around, they turn and watch. If I move closer, they may raise up on their legs a bit and lift their collection of eyes upward. Watching. Curious. I don’t sense that they are either defensive or aggressive. I’m so much

bigger, but they don’t seem to care.

With so many creatures living in fear of humans, isn’t it a relief, even a delight, to find some little thing (or maybe a big one) that isn’t afraid of us and doesn’t want to hurt or eat us? (I can’t help imagining the worlds of Narnia or the Lord of the Rings where humans and hobbits are kin to many living things, or the Native American belief that “we are relatives”).

Now, I’m consistently skeptical of the way we anthropomorphize our world, our universe. And religion is the expert at that. But I also understand it. We’re curious too. We want to know what’s out there and up there and down there, and if there’s a “there” there. And we think maybe “it’s” like us—an insect, an animal, the world, the universe, god. So we look closer. Or we don’t, and miss some important lessons.

One lesson I have to keep learning is “just be right here and watch, listen.” This makes me even more curious — “eager to learn something,” from a root-word for “careful.” Sounds like a contradiction, doesn’t it? When we’re being eager we can “throw care to the wind” in our enthusiasm; we get so excited at some new discovery, we may not care that much to be careful. Yet, this is who we are. We are jumping spiders.

In her work, Carol tries to understand people better. I tried that for a long time. Now I think I’m more interested in trying to understand the non-human world better. What’s going on around me, and why? What IS that, and what’s it doing?

Eating lunch with jumping spiders made me more curious about them. I found out that they don’t have ears, but they pick up vibrations from all the tiny hairs along their body.

Keep an eye out for them. They’re keeping all theirs out for you!