

What To Do When You Find a Spider in the Tub When You Wake Up and You Always Shower in the Morning and Especially on a Morning When You Have a Doctor's Appointment That You're Already Running Late For and You Surely Can't Show Up Stinky at the Doctor's Office and Later at Your Office in the Huge Corporate Lawfirm Where You're Still Only an Associate, and Other Life Lessons

It happened last Monday. No big deal, you say? Well, yeah, normally. I mean, I'm a regular guy, and until that morning I would have just turned on the faucet and drained the thing and showered without regret or recrimination. But the problem was the day before I'd been exposed to the notion that one shouldn't kill or harm a "sentient being."

This came about as follows: At the Sunday swap meet I bought a bundle of books tied together, five for a dollar (the top one was the only Tom Clancey I hadn't read), and when I cut the string a soft-covered paperback entitled *The Middle Way*, authored by someone with an impossible number of consonants in his names, its cover bearing the image of a gentle, half-smiling Buddha, tumbled onto the table and this girl—young woman—standing next to me exclaimed, "Oh, do you read Chjanthra Ahtmanjtha too?"

She wasn't my type, not at all. I mean, my last two girlfriends were CPA's, and this girl was completely hippie-ish. She was nice-looking, though—in a truly nice way. Her face was round and smiley, her hair was flowing all around, really soft, and she was wearing this loose, cottony dress with yellow flowers on it. Not my type, not at all. But for some reason, I said, "Yes."

"Great!" she said, and gave me this warm, wise half-smile, like we'd just shared a profound, slightly amusing secret. Kind of like the Buddha's middle-way smile on the book cover.

As I walked beside her to her bicycle—while she chatted enthusiastically about Chjanthra Ahthmanjtha's chapters on "All Creatures, Great and Great" and "Unattaching from Attachments" and "Half a Loaf is Better," and so forth, and I nodded with faked familiarity—she mentioned this group of folks who met every Monday morning at nine at a coffee shop nearby.

"What do you meet about?"

"Oh, we just talk about stuff," she said.

"What kind of stuff?"

"Just stuff," she said. "Our experiences, our meditation practice. Stuff. Wanna join us tomorrow?"

"I don't know..."

"No, really. Do come! It's really informal, just four of us. Really, please come!" She gave me that warm, wise half-smile again.

I said, "Maybe," but inside me I said, "No way." It all sounded so weird, and besides, I had my weekly doctor's appointment at eight-thirty, for an hour, after which I was due at my office. I couldn't cut short the doctor's appointment, and I couldn't arrive after nine forty-five at the lawfirm. No way.

But just before bed, for some reason, I opened the Buddha-book and skimmed it. Actually, I read in their entirety the chapters the girl had mentioned—that's where I learned it was a no-no to kill or harm a sentient being—and didn't fall asleep until two, which caused me to oversleep and so to be running late for my doctor's appointment—and thereupon to confront the spider.

My first thought was that maybe it's not a "sentient being." But that didn't work: According to the book, everything—from elephants to (almost) sandstone—was sentient.

Then I thought this: Nobody's watching, except, of course, the spider, which, though presently sentient, would after a thorough dousing no longer be. I mean, I wasn't a Buddhist, and if I later chose to become one, my path could then begin—immediately after this shower, if I so chose. But for some reason that didn't work, either.

So I decided to save the spider, or at least try to. I went to the kitchen and got a big spoon and a spatula, but when I tried to scoop it up it kept skittering away along the sides of the tub. This not only delayed me, it annoyed me—"I'm just trying to spare you, dammit!"—but then for some reason I found myself thinking what the spider must be feeling as it was being chased around an alien, enamel-walled world by gigantic metallic devices, wielded by a cursing monster.

I considered alternatives. Maybe I could just gently wash the spider down the drain with a small enough trickle of water to allow it to grab hold of the side of the pipe and hang on until the rush of water from my shower subsided. Or maybe I could grab it with a Kleenex and shake it out the window. But for some reason these solutions didn't suffice either: The book said one shouldn't "harm" a sentient being, so even if the spider physically survived the drainpipe experience or the force of my grip through the Kleenex, we're talking significant harm, possibly a lifetime of PTSD.

It was getting really late and so it now came down to this: either kill or harm the spider or stink all day. But then, for some reason, it occurred to me that maybe I could—just this once—skip the shower and simply swipe my pits and crotch with a washcloth and spray on some deodorant, the way I understood sufficed for morning cleansing in

many civilized nations. I'd be (relatively) clean and odor-free, and the spider would be alive, unharmed, and I could deal with it when I got home after work, assuming it hadn't somehow found its way to freedom. In fact, I could leave the faucet dripping and toss a slice of apple into the shower in case it needed nutrition during the day.

And then, for some reason, it came to me: the placing-a-glass-over-it-then-sliding-a-paper-underneath-it method of spider-capture and disposition! Why didn't I think of that before?

So that's what I did, patiently, gently. The spider seemed much relieved—really grateful—when I placed it on the window ledge, freeing it into the world; after which I gave myself a few pit-and-crotch swipes and arrived at my doctor's office only a little late.

Turns out, the session lasted only a half hour, because for some reason I didn't seem to have as much to tell him as I usually did; and when he asked me if I wanted to renew my Prozac prescription again, for some reason I told him to cut the dosage in half.

After the session, I decided to stop at the coffee shop. I'd just drop by for a little while—I could be a half-hour late to my office just this once—and maybe learn something about those chapters I'd read. And then, as I was driving there, I became aware that I was doing so both because I wanted to learn about Buddhism and because I wanted to learn what was underneath that girl's cotton dress. And for some reason I found that my lips had formed that same warm, wise, half-smile that I'd first seen the day before.