

Wisdom from the wonders of a web



Highland Views
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Guest columnist

The morning sun caught it through the summer fog. Glistening in the spotlight, suspended in air between a tall sycamore and dewy bushes below, the web was magnificent. Not a perfect circle, yet it appeared as perfection incarnate. My eyes traced the threads forming the gossamer net. As I sipped hot tea, the steam drifted up, disappearing as I re-focused on the delicate creation still and silent in the mountain morning.

It's easy to be poetic at these moments. Words dissipate like steam, then I'm compelled to fumble for words to express the inexpressible beauty before my eyes. We've all seen beautiful things. If we care to look, to pay attention, we see them every day; wonders that catch our attention, if only in a brief breath of

awe.

Have you ever paused to consider, perhaps no one else has seen that same thing, that no one may ever see what you are seeing in that moment? What if no one, nobody, had ever witnessed what you have witnessed? Whatever it is — a web perhaps — has never been seen, or will never be seen again just the way you perceive it. A humbling thought, don't you think? (shouldn't human beings be the most humble creatures on the planet?) After all, we are aware of our fragility and mortality in the face of Nature's immense, overwhelming power.

We may not be aware, but we all view things no one else views. In the right place at the right time, anyone could see what we see, whatever is visible, possible to be viewed by others, if they were present, if they noticed or you pointed it out, whatever it was. I've never been too impressed by those who claim they see what no one else can see, even if another person was present, things that reason tells us simply can't be seen. These

may include extraordinary claims of the super-natural, the invisible (to anyone but the one insisting they see it), the non-sensical (beyond the senses). Maybe they have such a deep desire to perceive something beyond the natural world, imagination takes them the next step, over the line, through the threshold of belief. If that desire is so strong, and the imagination so intense, I wonder why the natural world, with its endlessly wondrous creations, its amazing, incredible and beyond-all-superlatives daily surprises, isn't enough. Why isn't the wonder of a web shining in the morning light, sufficient for a secular experience of "sacredness," perhaps even embodying wise instruction on interconnection and interrelationship?

I wouldn't be too bothered if you questioned whether I saw that morning web. I'm fairly sure if you were present, I could have pointed to it and you would see it too, at a different angle perhaps, or with a different focus of the eyes. But we would both see the web. Chances are you wouldn't doubt my story because

you've seen webs too, maybe similar ones where you live. Yet, if I claimed there was a fairy caught in the web, or the spider spoke to me (Charlotte's Web-like), you would be right to question this unlikely claim. If I said: "You just had to be here; you would have seen it too!" That wouldn't be good enough, would it?

It seems fairly clear to me: the natural world teaches us everything we need to know about everything, including faith and religion. That's because the material world gives us everything we have, everything we experience with our senses. This "secular" world is all we have, all we ever will have; it's all we get. The question then becomes: now what? We become students of beauty, even impermanent beauty. As we are transitory, so is all Nature; yet Nature is eternal, and we are too (atomically if not anatomically). While our own human web lasts, we can weave the good, the wise and the beautiful.

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Later in the afternoon, when the sun was high and the fog had lifted, it was gone — no trace of the exquisite web re-

mained. Did a bird fly through it, or the wind take it down? Did a branch break the strands to make the natural artwork drift to the ground? Since I don't know what happened, chances are no one knows, or will ever know. I suspect the spider-creator knows. It doesn't have to dream or believe a web exists. The web

is within. Time to work again. Another day, another opportunity to bring out "what lies within," to create something new, something beautiful once again. It may take all night, last for a morning, and be gone by the afternoon. But it is a practical creation — a catcher of flying food — an essential for life. What could

we capture in our web of wisdom?

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