Traps

While traveling in Costa Rica a few years ago I spent an afternoon on the beach. It was one of those postcard settings with turquoise waters, white sands, green palms and gentle breezes in a quiet secluded cove. Well almost secluded. A small group of locals showed up mid afternoon – spider monkeys.

Our family had stashed some snacks under the trees, and in a flash attack the locals snatched the goodies while hanging from their tails; then retreated into the treetops as quickly as they had come.

That episode recalled for me the story of the monkey traps of India…

It is said that monkeys, like people, are too smart to be caught in conventional traps. They simply avoid them. So instead, monkeys are captured through a strategy that takes advantage of their nature – a ready appetite, desire for fulfillment, and a tenacious will.

It works like this… A gourd is cut in half, and hollowed out; then the halves are reassembled and lashed together. A small hole just big enough for the monkey’s slender hand is drilled in the side of the gourd. The finished “trap” is then tied to a tree and baited with rice, nuts, or sweets that are placed into the gourd through the hole.

Attracted by the tempting smell, a monkey will insert its open hand through the hole and grasp the bait. With a fist full of bait the monkey’s clenched hand becomes too large to be withdrawn from the gourd.

Unwilling to release its prize and unable to escape to freedom, the monkey is easily captured. The only thing preventing its escape is the monkey’s own natural appetite and tenacity. It need only open its hand to escape. It is mentally trapped by its own desires and will.

People too have tendencies to be captured in mental traps – traps of their own making. Traps that are subconscious and so subtle that those trapped often don’t even recognize their situation and potential vulnerability. They are trapped by their own acceptance, habits, desires, comfort, fears, security, insecurity, ego, assumptions, opinions, ideas, dogma, or “brand of truth”.

They are trapped simply because they are unwilling or unable to let go; and they may even find a certain predictability and comfort in the situation. The trap is mental.

To beat the trap, one needs to be open to explore fresh perspectives, experiences, and understandings.

There are four strategies when it comes to traps.

1. Don’t take the bait
2. Identify the situation and get out
3. Beat the trap – figure out a solution
4. Take advice from others

It is far easier to see the traps that hold others than it is to see those that hold us. Traps are everywhere for everyone - they limit potential and possibilities.

Traps hold us back from the full promise of our journey. They hold us back from fully helping others who are on their own journey. It is difficult to hold the hands of others when one’s own hand is clenched and trapped. An open hand holds more than one that is closed. So it is too with matters of the mind.