

Tumbleweed Who Forgot to Tumble

JoAnne Dodgson, Ed.D.

www.pathwaysforhealing.net

I've been clearing a patch of land near my house where there's a burly overgrowth of brown tumbleweeds. My harvesting wardrobe includes thick leather gloves and toeless socks pulled over my forearms to prevent painful encounters with the sharp prickly spines. I've gotten to wondering about this unlikely gathering of still-rooted tumbleweeds. Why haven't they tumbled the way tumbleweeds do? What's held them in place despite their natural inclination in this cycle of their lives to uproot and travel, to blow around in the winds and wildly dance across the lands? Do they really like it here or have they just gotten stuck?

My clearing-away of the aged tumbleweeds has revealed unexpected treasures. Hidden beneath the crunchy brown tangle I've discovered a lush growing world of green. A vibrant Yucca once buried beneath the overgrowth now stands visible and undisguised, joyfully reaching toward the sky. There's a tender vine with white blossoms opening wide to welcome the mornings and closing up in the afternoon heat. Purple wildflowers color the landscape. The soil is sunning herself in renewal, nourishing the now-open space for new life in her patch of land.

From what I've seen, Tumbleweeds are ingenious. They begin by growing low to the ground with tiny green leaves and dark purple stems spreading out weblike in all directions. Their roots dive into the earth with a strong central core surrounded by a weaving of tendrils running just below the surface of the soil. In this season of their lives, Tumbleweeds tenaciously hold their ground. Growing upward and outward in a spidery open-armed embrace, their plant bodies become round and full, light and airy, perfectly shaped for the journeys to come.

Carried somewhere inside the tumbleweeds' knowing are all the how-to's and why's and whens to guide their transformation. Instinctually, Tumbleweeds stop gathering up nutrients from the soil and sun and rains. Their bodies turn brown, dry out and harden to hold onto the roundness essential for rolling with the winds. As their shallow roots naturally detach from the earth, Tumbleweeds free themselves up from the life that has been. Riding on the winds, they head off on their passionate quests - no maps to follow, destination unknown. They scatter thousands of seeds as they tumble along, planting countless potentials for the generations to come, seeding the land with the very blueprints for new life.

So here in the high desert just beyond the living room window, what's up with the tumbleweeds who've forgotten to tumble? I sense they've stayed put just long enough to roll into my awareness, tugging at my curiosity with the

mystery of their presence, inviting me to gather up the wisdoms of their ways.

Touching the world of the tumbleweeds has allowed me to feel what it's like to naturally embody change. These wild nomads of the desert readily transform and playfully tumble around in their dance with life and death, all according to their unique, ingenious design. Tumbleweeds know about rooting themselves only when and where it's nourishing. And they intentionally move on from what-has-been when the cycle is complete, when that purpose has been served, honoring it all with their ease, lightness and quirky grace. Tumbleweeds have shown me how to call in the winds to let old attachments go.

I've come to see this aged gathering of browned tumbleweeds as a council of elders who hold and seed sacred ground for the generations to come. The tumbleweeds know it's never too late to remember what's been forgotten. If we've come here to tumble, to love or heal or dream, to build or sing or create, we can start any time, any day.

In the harvesting of the tumbleweeds and their teachings, I've grown aware of the understanding we share. That I'm home and it's time for me to dig in my roots and tenaciously hold my center, to reach out and give and receive in the sharings with a spidery open-armed embrace. And it's time for the tumbleweeds to move on, to uproot and get untangled so they can follow their spirits' callings and flow with the freedom of their quests.

The prickly brown Tumbleweeds easily pull away from the sandy soil and I walk with them toward the open mesas, huge billowy armfuls of sundried plants held over my head. I place them on the ground on the other side of the fence so they're lying now on wilderness lands - free to dance with the elements and join up with the winds and continue on their way.