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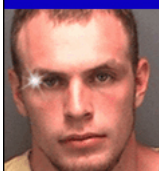
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The fear of spiders, or arachnophobia, is far from uncommon in today's world. What is uncommon, however, is a deeper understanding of the immense symbolic importance this creature has to many cultures.



In western Africa and among certain Native American populations, the spider plays a prominent role in stories and folktales. The figure of Anansi (Ananse) the trickster spider is particularly beloved among the Ashanti people of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. By relying on his wit and intelligence, Anansi is able to accomplish tasks that larger and more powerful animals have failed at, demonstrating that having a strong mind is just as important as being strong in the body. Because of the spider's ability to spin such intricate webs, Native Americans of the southwestern United States hold it in high esteem as a creator figure (this association is also shared by other cultures). Among the Hopi people, for example, Spider Woman not only created both humans and animals, but also spun her silken thread into a ball to create the moon.

According to Greek mythology, the first spider was originally a human woman named Arachne (hence the word "arachnid") who bested the goddess Athena in a weaving contest, earning her the punishment of being turned into a spider. The ability to weave, however gave the spider a strong association with fate and destiny. Just as the spider

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spun her web, the Fates (three women who ruled over the aforementioned domains) spun the thread of life and determined the eventual outcome for all living things, including the gods themselves.

In Islam, the spider plays a curious role as a protector. The story goes that when the Prophet Mohammed fled from the Arabian city of Medina, he took refuge from his pursuers in a cave. While he was hiding, a spider came along and spun a large web across the mouth of the cave. When his pursuers arrived, they determined that the cave was not occupied- since anyone going into it would have broken the web in the process- and moved on, thus Mohammed was spared.

Even without esoteric symbolic meaning assigned to it, the spider plays an important role that can have a powerful effect on human society. By preying on disease-carrying insects such as mosquitos and certain species of flies, the spider helps prevent potentially deadly diseases from infecting the human population (the praying mantis also shares this role).

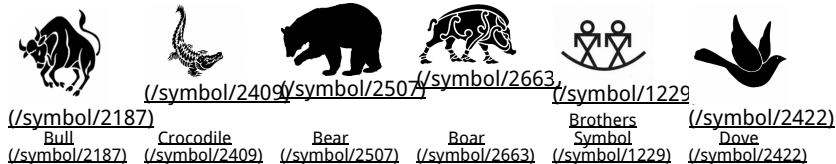
Graphical characteristics:

Symmetric, Open shape, Monochrome, Contains both straight and curved lines, Has no crossing lines.

Categories: [Animal Symbolism \(/category/13\)](#), [Native American Symbols \(/category/40\)](#).

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