

Defining what it means to be human

by MARK PAVILONS

We human beings are curious, intelligent critters.

We shed our furry bodies and tiny tails and achieved great things over the millennia.

But what makes us unique and what separates us from the rest of Earth's flora and fauna?

Is it intelligence??It is because we can use all of our fingers and toes? It is our eyesight, hearing, sense of taste??Is it our imagination?

Yes, it's all of these things, and just a little bit more.

More importantly, I believe what makes human beings unique in the cosmos are our emotions. But what are they and how do we define them?

These weird experiences are complex sensations that our brains translate into, well, feelings and actions.

Robert Plutchik's theory defined eight basic emotions ??ear, anger, sadness, joy, disgust, surprise, trust and anticipation.

Odd that love isn't among these.

It's also interesting because it's like the yin and yang thing. Every emotion can have a positive or negative connotation. Surprise can also be shock. Trust, apparently, includes admiration. Anticipation can also be trepidation.

I won't attempt to venture into all of these, but I will take you on a journey through some of the more pleasant emotions.

I think we've all had our fair share of sadness, fear and anger during the pandemic. Some say these experiences, and the emotions tied to them, will last a long time.

I'm not qualified to comment on people's psychological nuances. All I can do is offer some thoughts and perspectives.

?If you carry joy in your heart, you can heal any moment.? ??arlos Santana

What does joy look like? This likely varies from person to person, but I think there are some universal themes we can agree on.

For parents, whether you're new to the profession or veterans, a smiling, laughing baby has got to be one of the most joyous things in the world. I don't care who you are, a giggling, toothless infant will melt the hardest of frozen hearts. And those squeaky sounds, well that goes without saying.

Now that we have one idea of what it looks like, what does joy feel like? To me, joy feels like holding back laughter, almost to the point of bursting. It may emit a sound, like air escaping from pinching the neck of a balloon. Perhaps it's being on the verge of tears at a particularly heart-warming event.

For others, it could be sipping on a frosty, tasty beverage on a tropical beach. It may be the feeling you get just before falling asleep in a hammock or passing out on the sofa with your pet keeping you warm and toasty.

Maybe some emotions can't be easily segregated. Perhaps joy is somehow linked to love, kindness, passion and compassion.

'Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle.' - Plato

Yes, they are, brother. I imagine quite a few of our fellow brothers and sisters are fighting right now. They are being challenged, physically, emotionally, spiritually and financially.

We don't always know what our friends and neighbours are going through.

With that in mind, I believe our main approach, and first thought in society, should be one of kindness.

Kindness is infectious. When has kindness ever been met with anger? Okay, sure, once in a while. But, I mean, when you are kind to someone, aren't they pleasantly surprised, and don't they offer up a big smile and 'thank you'? Of course. Kind acts spark joy.

In fact, kindness is like snow - it beautifies everything it covers!

Plus, you never know how one small act may have a ripple effect. Someone could be having a really bad day, and your expression of kindness could be the glimmer of goodness they needed.

It's never wasted.

'Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.' - Lao Tzu

Now, let's tackle love, one of the most written about aspects of human nature, and in fact, human history.

Most of us experience love in one form or another. If you've been lucky to find the love of your life, never let them go!

Those who are married and have children know a lot about love in all of its iterations. There's a love that exists between parents and their children that's hard to describe. You'd do anything for them, even give up your life for them. And yet, at times, you can be quite frustrated with them. A mental picture of Homer Simpson strangling Bart comes to mind.

It's quite a responsibility raising a child through adulthood, and let's face it, way beyond that! It's a life-long undertaking, one that's hopefully filled with those joyful and emotionally abundant moments.

Well, my friends, in between those 'fight or flight' moments, let's concentrate on the more joyous ones, those that go down like a hot cup of chocolate on a cold winter's night.

I encourage everyone not to dwell on the madness, but to concentrate on the amazing moments. When you have a moment of calm, and a smile emerges at the side of your mouth, stop, embrace it, hold on to it as long as it lasts!

Seize that fluffy, marshmallowy blob of joy and devour its sweetness!