

Our bodies are much more than vessels

by Mark Pavilons

The human body is strange and flawed and unpredictable. The human body has many secrets, and it does not divulge them to anyone, except those who have learned to wait. Paul Auster

Our bodies are truly magnificent pieces of machinery. They're beyond intricate and despite the fact every one is unique and priceless, we all get one.

It's like our essence gets a new outfit - an overcoat or sorts - at the time of our birth. It's like winning the evolutionary lottery. Alas, with any windfall can come bankruptcy, physically or emotionally.

While some of us are capable of throwing 100-mile-per-hour fastballs, or skating down the ice on a break-away, we're imperfect and fragile.

Yes, girls are made from sugar, spice and so many nice things. Boys, on the other hand, are made from snails and the odd bits of a puppy's tail.

But science knows we're made of a tiny bit more.

Humans are composed of 84 minerals, 23 elements and 8 gallons of water, distributed among 38 billion cells. Roughly 99% of the mass of the human body is made up of six elements: oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus. Less than 1% is composed of another five elements: potassium, sulfur, sodium, chlorine, & magnesium. All 11 are necessary for life.

Our bodies have seven septillion atoms (7 followed by 26 zeroes). Add another 30 trillion human cells and another 38 trillion bacterial cells. Our temples host roughly 200 different cell types, the majority found in our blood.

We are not unlike our brethren in the universe, literally. Stars, like our sun, are necessary for life to flourish. Our sun, through nuclear fusion in its core, converts hydrogen into helium. Massive amounts of energy are released during this process, providing the building blocks for elements such as oxygen, and nitrogen. What are humans made of? Well, stardust of course!

We have been built out of nothing by spare parts of the earth that we have consumed, according to a set of instructions hidden in a double helix, small enough to be carried by a single sperm.

We are made of recycled butterflies, plants, rocks, streams, firewood, wolf skins and shark teeth, decomposed into their smallest parts and reconstructed into the most complex living being on our planet.

We're not living on earth, we are earth!

All of this comes together in a rather neat package, controlled by something much more complex. The human brain, with its staggering 100 trillion neural connections, generates self-awareness. We're not quite sure how electrical signals become thoughts and emotions, but there you have it.

Unlike any other known biological system, the human brain can contemplate its own existence, creating a recursive loop of awareness that challenges our understanding of perception and reality.

We also need to remember that we are spiritual beings just spending some time in a body.

Approximately half of the world's population adheres to religious or spiritual beliefs. The cornerstone of spiritual beliefs is the existence of the spirit or soul. Even those who do not follow a religion believe that our essence is spirit.

Plato believed in the concept of dualism ? that the body and soul are separate entities. He argued that the soul is immortal and unchanging, while the body is a temporary residence.

Descartes argued that our ability to think and reason is enough to prove the existence of a soul.

Thomas Aquinas, a medieval theologian, also argued that the soul is the vital principle that animates the body and gives it life.

Dr. Stuart Hameroff, an anesthesiologist and professor at the University of Arizona, conducted a recent study into the brain activity of clinically dead patients. He found that an electroencephalogram (EEG) seemed to capture a strange burst of energy that occurred shortly after death.

This gamma synchrony, he said, is typically linked to our conscious thought, awareness and perception.

?So that could be the near-death experience, or it could be the soul leaving the body, perhaps.?

He also stressed that consciousness happens at a quantum level. A quantum object exists in multiple states at once and quantum physics seems to be all about probabilities.

I'd choose another word to describe our souls, but hey, if science even admits it's possible, I'm good with that.

Does it open a curtain, and reveal the literal ?stairway to heaven??

Atman, one of the most basic concepts in Hinduism, is the universal self. After death it either transmigrates to a new life or attains release (moksha) from the bonds of existence.

Interestingly, the 12 unique characteristics of Atman are: eternal, undecaying, one without a second, pure and untouched by matter, distinct from the body, the support of pure consciousness, without volition, changeless, self-aware, the cause of all, unattached, and infinite.

Boy, all of those terms can be used to describe our soul, the spark inside each and every one of us.

If we can beat the odds of coming into existence (1 in 400 quadrillion), maybe there's a bit more than snips and snails and puppy dog tails in my DNA.

My friends, we are miracles, coming into being from microscopic parts of our parents, growing into marvellous, albeit somewhat selfish creatures. We can not only run and jump, but reach for the stars and create energy from atoms.

Recycled though we may be, perhaps we carry with us the most important things of all ? the cells of all that has been. We're like a vessel that contains all of creation.

While I would have come up with something a bit more reliable to carry such priceless material, I?suppose we humans will do for now.

And maybe, just maybe, in those seconds when we transcend into a quantum state, we take all of humankind with us, to ports unknown.

Happy trails, everyone!