

What does it take for us to evolve?

by Mark Pavilons

What will it take for our species to rise up, meet the challenges as one, unified world?

My son told me something very poignant the other day. He said if we don't let go of animosity in our hearts and come together as one species, we will never rise to another, greater level.

In other words, we won't evolve into something better unless we let go of our negative human qualities.

He's quite right.

Of course, here in the western world, we're likely the worst role models. We have plenty of negative qualities and 'sins' that we have to atone for.

We buy short, flip houses, and sell things with huge mark-ups. We work overtime, trying to convince our bosses that we deserve that promotion. We collect things. We created cryptocurrency.

We stress over money and the price of gas at the pumps. We waste food.

Compare that to the average farmer in India, who thanks God for his one cow that provides so much for his family.

And what about the Mexican street vendor, who serves customers around the world with food using his great-grandmother's recipe? He charges pennies for his labours.

Humans are smug, thinking we are the champions, sitting atop the food chain. We take comfort in our intelligence, and opposable thumbs, giving us an edge. And yet, our intelligence is limited and can hinder our personal growth.

Take it from a wise man we all knew:

'The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.' (Dr. Seuss, I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!)

Yes, Theo, there's so much to learn.

Since we're sitting pretty in command of this planet, we seldom think about the relative intelligence of the creatures we share our earth with. And yet, all living things possess a certain degree of perception and understanding.

One key factor in trying to measure intelligence in lower life forms is self-awareness. We can't be sure that ants, bees, snakes and butterflies are not self-aware. Do they possess a concept of 'self'?

Mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians show problem-solving and social skills and even some mathematical abilities.

The corvid family of birds is quite clever and experts say crows are as smart as a seven-year-old child.

Elephants have the largest brains and not only have exceptional memories but co-operate with one another and engage in 'play'. They also have a sense of humour.

Pigs can solve mazes, display emotions and have mastered the concept of ?reflection.?

The octopus is the only invertebrate that uses tools. Raccoons are quite adept at picking locks!

Other smart critters include rats, squirrels and chickens.

Of course, we have our best friends ? cats and dogs. They likely could understand and learn much more if we only took the time to teach them. One owner reported teaching his dog hundreds of words.

Dolphins have self-awareness and also possess intelligence, a sense of humour and a desire to communicate with humans.

So, a dolphin would love to have a conversation with us, share stories and co-operate, even though we are two entirely different species? Yet we humans can't get along.

Just as Seuss pointed out, we could learn so much from one another ? from all of the world's flora and fauna ? if we tried. Okay, that's a whole other level of science and effort, but it's worth a try.

We have the tools and advanced knowledge to deal with humans on all levels. We understand languages and can communicate. We have a grasp of neuroscience. We have a handle on religion and culture. We know where babies come from regardless of whether you live in a palace or grass hut.

And yet we can't agree on politics, equality, economic stability, military might or climate change

Right now, the Russian leadership is more concerned about flexing its military muscle, and exposing western weakness than solving its own internal COVID or economic problems. Other NATO?countries are worried because they once lived under Communist rule and never want to experience oppression ever again.

We know all about conflict, civil war, strife, aggression and destruction. Why would ?intelligent? beings even consider such violent, destructive behaviour? Have we learned nothing from our past?

Here in North America, we recognize bullies for what they are, and work hard to curb their behaviour.

People wonder why we have a passion for exploration and send vehicles into space. Why not spend the money here and eliminate homelessness and addiction? Why not build shelters instead of probes?

I?think discovering ?what's out there??may very well help us figure out ?what's down here.? Our thirst for knowledge is a very human quality.

Hopefully we will be visited again by our alien cousins, who drop in on us from time to time and monitor our progress. Not sure if they're pleased.

They still may not be fully convinced we deserve first contact. I see where they're coming from.

They may in fact have better luck chatting with dolphins or ravens.

My son also pointed out that our knowledge cannot be ?un-learned.? So, our own inner data banks can absorb and retain countless gigabytes of info. Let's use it all!

We have tremendous potential to mature into something great.

Moving forward, we have to walk on common ground, join hands and really open our eyes.