

SUBJECT: SERMON IDEAS
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IF ONLY I COULD BE LIKE MY CELLS
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What does it mean to live a spiritual life? Who can teach me the core principles of spirituality?

Strangely enough my own body can teach me everything I need to know. The cells of my body are already doing what I want to learn. My body does everything better, with more passion and commitment than me. The cells in my body have no problem fully participating in life. A hundred thousand billion of them signed on to the same silent agreement, which can be described through qualities that the most spiritual person would envy-but the most practical person would envy them at the same time. These shared qualities speak eloquently for what a cell agrees not to do as much as for what it does.

Higher Purpose: A cell agrees to work for the welfare of the whole body first and its individual welfare second. If necessary it will die to protect the body-the lifetime of any given cell is a fraction of our own lifetime. Skin cells perish by the thousands every hour, as do immune cells fighting off invading microbes. Selfishness is not an option, even when it comes down to a cell's survival.

Communion: A cell keeps in touch with every other cell. Messenger molecules race everywhere to notify the farthest outposts of any desire or intention, however slight. Withdrawing or refusing to communicate is not an option.

Awareness: Cells adapt from moment to moment. They remain flexible in order to respond to immediate situations. Getting caught up in rigid habits is not an option.

Acceptance: Cells recognize each other as equally important. Every function in the body is interdependent with every other. Going it alone is not an option.

Creativity: Although every cell has a set of unique functions (liver cells, for example, can perform fifty separate functions), these combine in creative ways. A person can digest food never eaten before, think thoughts never thought before, dance in a way never seen before. Clinging to old behavior is not an option.

Being: Cells obey the universal cycle of rest and activity. Although this cycle expresses itself in many ways such as fluctuating hormone levels, blood pressures, and digestive rhythms, the most obvious expression is sleep. Why we need to sleep remains a medical mystery, yet complete dysfunction develops if we don't. In the silence of inactivity the future of the body is incubating. Being obsessively active is not an option.

Efficiency: Cells function with the least expenditure of energy. Typically a cell only stores three seconds of food and oxygen inside the cell wall. It trusts totally on being

provided for. Excessive consumption of food, air, or water is not an option, and neither is hoarding.

Bonding: Due to their common genetic inheritance, cells know that they are fundamentally the same. The fact that liver cells are different from heart cells, and muscle cells different from brain cells does not negate their common identity, which is unchanging. In the laboratory a muscle cell can be genetically transformed into a heart cell by going back to their common source. Cells remain tied to their source no matter how many times they divide. Being an outcast is not an option.

Giving: The primary activity of cells is giving, which, maintains the integrity of all other cells. Total commitment to giving makes receiving automatic-it is the other half of a natural cycle. Hoarding is not an option.

Immortality: Cells reproduce in order to pass on their knowledge, experience, and talents, withholding nothing from their offspring. This is a kind of practical immortality, submitting to death on the physical plane but defeating it on the non-physical. The generation gap is not an option.

When I look at what my cells have agreed to, isn't it a spiritual pact in every sense of the word? Other labels work just as well for any of these qualities. The first, higher purpose, could be changed to surrender or selflessness. Awareness includes both alertness and adaptability. But my body is unconcerned with labels. To it, these qualities are woven into everyday existence.

They are the result of life's inner intelligence evolving over billions of years as biology. If you examine the structure of a single cell, nothing like surrender, awareness, or communion would be evident. These qualities aren't present in single-celled organisms like bacteria, yeasts, and amoebas. The mystery of life was patient and careful in allowing its full potential to emerge. Single-celled creatures continue to thrive-thousands live in your intestines, which could not digest food without them. Evolution moves forward, but it remembers where it has been, and nothing is lost.

Even now the silent agreement that holds my body together feels like a secret, because to all appearances it doesn't exist. More than two hundred and fifty types of cells go about their daily business-the fifty functions that a liver cell performs are totally unique, not overlapping with the tasks of muscle, kidney, heart, or brain cells-yet it would be catastrophic if even one function were compromised. As it divides into billions of progeny, the first fertilized cell in my mother's womb kept its link to the source. At the level of memory, I still am that first cell. If I possess a soul, anything I could possibly know about it was told to my body first.

The mystery of life has found a way to express itself through me. In fact that's my purpose for being here. Am I fulfilling that purpose? If you read over the list again and take note of everything marked "not an option," you confront a stark fact: The very behavior that would kill our bodies in a day hasn't been renounced by us as people. We

are selfish and greedy. We refuse to cooperate; we behave as though there is no higher purpose more important than the demands of I, me, and mine. In our fragmentation and confusion, we've been ignoring the very model of a perfect spiritual life inside ourselves.

As they evolved, cells learned what really works for survival. Your body can't afford to pay lip service to leading a spiritual life unless it wants to throw away eons of wisdom. Yet the vast majority of suffering in our personal lives comes about because we consciously choose to behave contrary to the soul bargain that keeps our bodies alive.