

At odds with our survival instinct

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What drives Earth's creatures to survive?

Is it all pre-determined and wired into our biological systems? Or is it a conscience effort to do what's necessary to carry on the species?

All very good questions.

Most scientists believe that both humans and intelligent animals are wired to survive. We all know we need food and ideal environmental conditions to survive in our habitat. We inherently know that reproduction will ensure the sustainability of the species.

There is a lot of evidence to support the fact these 'instincts' are embedded into our brains and we do it subconsciously.

A toddler left on its own will eat pet food to survive. We shy away from bitter or horrible tasting substances because they may be poisonous. We flinch. We apparently choose our mates based on genes and physical senses that detect who will blend best with our DNA.

Our instinct tells us to live healthy, and yet our modern lifestyles are anything but.

If you think about it, it's very cool how creatures in nature operate, and how intricate the entire food chain is. It's marvellously complex, from microbes and fungus, right up to human beings. Billions upon billions of critters rely on one another to carry out a seamless system that makes the world go 'round.

We humans, though, tend to buck the rules. We are an exception.

When we 'evolved' enough to exercise our free will and go against the grain, that's when we threw a monkey wrench into the entire process that the Creator laid out for us.

When our ancestors slithered out of the primordial ooze, we were just part of the chain, being either a source of food or a consumer. It may not have been the cosmic intention for us to lead, rule and screw things up.

Our ancestors tended to appeal to the 'gods' for survival, good weather and sustainable conditions. That involved all sorts of weird things, from prayer, creating tributes and monuments to human and animal sacrifices.

Our lifespans have more than doubled over the millennia. For a thousand years, we've been looking for the fountain of youth and the secrets of immortality.

It's believed the ancient Egyptians were the first to document a process and journey into the afterlife. Their ideas were quite fascinating, and involved a journey by the kings across treacherous waters, to reach a place where they can be at ease with the powers that govern such things. They worshipped many idols that helped in this journey or transcendence.

Almost every organized religion on the planet has a version of the afterlife. It's interesting to note that most agree we're in store for a heck of a ride, when our time here is over.

Indian doctrine says we are reincarnated time and again, based on how we live our lives. But the ideal situation is to break that cycle of constant reincarnation to reach the state of pure energy and be one with the universe.

When Jesus and his followers exposed Christianity to the world, He too, promised a glorious afterlife in Heaven.

So, the big question is, if the best is yet to come, and wonder awaits, why are we so geared to staying put? Why do we place so

much effort on survival?

In our past, millions of human beings were willing to die for a cause. Still today, some doctrine ensures a path to Heaven if you sacrifice your life here on Earth.

I'm not saying that we should all line up on the nearest cliff and take our turns jumping into the abyss. But should we fear death as we do?

Those who are strong in faith will tell you they do not fear the end.

If you've ever been at a someone's bedside when the time comes, you get a glimpse of this strange battle between 'here' and 'there'. Are they really at peace when they let go? Are they 'helped' in their final journey by some unseen force?

Stories told by those who've reached the brink of death and returned, describe bright lights, dead relatives and an overall euphoric feeling, a lightness of being. This all sounds amazing, almost enticing.

Euphoria? Life everlasting? Sign me up!

While I'm not an avid church-goer, I am fascinated by religious teachings and religious history.

I have always been a believer in something beyond this existence on terra firma. When I was a teenager, I remember laying awake at night, tormented by a lack of faith, thinking of nothingness. What if when we die, that's it, and all that we face is eternal darkness? What if our essence, our soul, is lost forever?

Horrible thoughts, right?

But these are the very thoughts we will all have to contend with, when the time comes. There's no escaping it.

Science and medicine will prolong our lives, but to what end? We can't cheat death, just avoid it a bit longer.

Who wants to live forever?

Take comfort in Patrick Swayze's line from the movie Ghost: 'It's amazing ... The love inside, you take it with you.'

Fight or flight. Live or die. Alpha and omega.

Don't fret. We'll see one another again on the other side!