

Your Body As Community

by C. Shaffia Laue, M.D.

The United States has been developed by rugged individuals, whom for a large part were those lone pioneers fighting nature, and anything else that got in their way. Although there have been times in our past where community was considered important, for the most part it was "every man for himself" in the evolution of our free enterprise system. We have become more aware of the wisdom of the Native Americans since that first Earth Day back in 1970. We are finally beginning to embrace the fact that our natural environment and our physical bodies can be coworkers in an ecological community.

Going beyond the interface of our physical body and the nature surrounding it, we can also begin to look at the body itself as a community that has needs for cooperation within itself. All of our specialized organ systems evolved from one single undifferentiated cell. As we grow up, the specialization becomes less flexible and more specific. Therefore, we have even greater needs for cooperation. You depend on your liver to take the chemical wastes of cellular metabolism, render them harmless to you and send them into elimination pathways. Your digestive system is responsible for absorbing all the necessary energy sources and building materials to run the cells you have and create new ones. But after providing raw materials it also removes waste products. It serves a double duty like the quarry that provides gravel for building and then is used as a dumpsite. The nervous system is part of your telecommunications both with the world outside your skin as well as with the miniature worlds inside. Now your heart and circulation are the transportation system moving the raw materials, wastes and defense systems where they need to go to be the most useful. Your defense against invasion from without or incorrigibles from within (i.e. cancer cells) is the immune system.

We could go on with this analogy in more detail, but I would like to consider what happens when aspects of this tight-knit interdependent community get overwhelmed. For example, insufficient raw materials are available for energy and/or building pathways. A specific consideration would be the B vitamins that are a necessary ingredient, especially in

energy production, but also help maintain healthy nerves, skin, eyes, hair, liver and mouth. Without sufficient B vitamins our body can sometimes use alternative pathways, but the detours cause slowdowns, and may eventually breakdown through overwork. Depending on which pathways are initially involved, your body will speak to you in different ways. A pain here, a weakness there, mental fog or feeling emotionally vulnerable are all ways that your body attempts to draw your attention to the problem. But how do we respond to these messages?

The most common response to these messages is to first attempt to ignore them, and then if they don't "just go away," we experience fear and/or anger. We are angry with the body "for doing this to us," and we have fear as to what it may mean. Contrast this with the response a mother gives her injured child of a soothing loving touch, and a kiss on the forehead or injury. For years some professionals have considered this a placebo activity, but Dolores Kriegger, Ph.D.,R.N. has brought scientific research to validate the healing properties of loving human touch.

We don't have to be at war with our bodies. Fighting a skin rash with cortisone to suppress it may make the itch go away, but in winning "the battle," we are losing the war. That rash may be the body's attempt to push out toxins that can't get through a clogged pathway. When we suppress the body's attempts to eliminate these toxins, they are driven deeper into the body. We need to develop better ways of understanding the messages we get. Another example would be a person with joint pain, who responds by taking an over the counter pain medication. What he doesn't realize is that the pain could be a message that he needs more raw materials for cartilage and that as his body detoxifies the medication it has to "steal" the sulfur groups from the joint to do it. In addition he has gone out for the evening drinking and dancing, which further stresses the painful inflamed joint and the liver's detoxification pathways.

Although our emotions may be a response to the message, the emotions we experience can also be a message from our physical body. Sadness, depression, anxiety, panic attacks are just some of the messages that can originate from an underlying physical problem. However, you are not depressed because of a nutritional deficiency of antidepressants! The medication only treats the superficial symptom while ignoring the deeper

problems. But, for those persons who are not ready to do the work necessary to heal the body, the chemical antidepressants will give them a bridge to keep them alive until they decide to seek other options.

Here we can expand our idea of the body as community beyond the physical into the mental and spiritual. All the religions I have ever studied have some notion of what we call soul, although they may call it different names. One can be an agnostic and deny this aspect of his/her personal community, but it doesn't stop soul from existing or from trying to communicate with the person's outer identity. The soul is part of the community as well as what some people call the high self, who exists to help us connect directly with our soul and our sense of fairness in dealing with others. Sometimes the "pains" in our interpersonal lives are part of the communication from our soul, trying to help us grow and become more aware of our spiritual aspects.

The mental aspects of our community can be described in several ways, but one of the best documented is the animus, anima and shadow in the writings of Carl Jung. He advises us that every person is born with these archetypes present within and that these archetypes exert an influence on us. Which is not to say that men and women are the same, but rather that each of us has those parts inside which need the receptive, loving and creative aspects of the feminine and the assertive, rational and logical parts that are often labeled masculine. The shadow is those parts of ourselves, which we dislike and have cut off, but like the soul it doesn't stop them from being. In another paradigm I have studied, the shadow is called the Judge self, which really fits. Most people can relate to this internal voice in the back of their head carrying on an excessive negative monologue. What does this judge want anyway? How can I get him/her to back off? We need to learn how to listen to these messages. We need to find professionals who can help us learn to understand how to get this internal community to work cooperatively for the highest spiritual good for everyone involved.

The path for you may include some bodywork or massage that compliments an integrative psychotherapy approach. Maybe yoga or martial arts would help you connect to your body in a physical way that could compliment your spiritual beliefs. Meditation, relaxation and imagery are methods that work for many people. A physician in Kansas City, Bill

Mundy, M.D., even wrote a book on curing allergy with visual imagery. Find techniques to which you can relate and get more in touch with your very personal community. There is a saying, "As above, so below." When an individual lives in harmony within one's self, that same harmony radiates outwards into the greater community and everything becomes more peaceful.

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