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"Messenger" human beings

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Editorial

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> "I can fly. I can really fly".
>
> Hermes, in Homer: The Odyssey (1919)

The messenger God

Hermes was the messenger God of Greek mythology. He was the herald and personal messenger of Zeus and also the guide of the dead who lead souls down into the underworld. He was mischievous and lusty, and was the grandson of Kronos (think chronological time), the son of Zeus, and the father of Pan (think "fun, play, awe"). Pan was a lustful, fun loving Satyr and God of the wild. Pan did not understand things like pain and suffering. He only could relate to the lighter and happier emotions in the universe of experiences. Hermes role as a messenger God was vital and critical, and the metaphor of a "messenger" between the transcendent and the earthly, the individual and the mortal is important in human cultures throughout the world. A Jungian archetype, one could argue. In this vein, I've been thinking about the role and purpose of human beings, human animals, and human life on this small planet in a vast universe. Why do we strive to live? What is the force that drives the "Will to live," especially the "Will to Live a human, mortal, finite life."

A biological role and purpose of human beings: to preserve and transmit DNA

For the past 35 years, I have dedicated my career to understanding the existential and psychiatric sources of distress and despair in cancer patients at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) in New York City. MSK is perhaps the pre-eminent cancer research center in the world. As a Psychiatric Clinician Scientist, I have worked alongside many Clinician Scientist colleagues, as well as many colleagues who have dedicated their careers to the basic science of cancer. More and more, over these 35 years, the science of genetics has become central to the key to our understanding of cancer and the promise of eliminating cancer as a cause of death, pain, and human suffering. At MSK, the basic scientist faculty, post-doctoral fellows and staff, and their laboratories are housed in the Sloan Kettering Institute (SKI), also home to many past, present, and future Nobel Laureates. My basic science colleagues are making groundbreaking discoveries in the understanding of cancer and the paths that lead to new, more effective treatments, at breakneck speed. I am in awe of their knowledge, creativity, innovation, and dedication. One interesting epiphenomenon of the incredible advances in our understanding of genetics, DNA, and related entities is a growing perspective on the role and purpose of the human animal in the spectrum of life forms on the sphere in space we call home/Earth. In more candid moments, I have heard the hypothesis set forth that "the truly dominant and most vital form of life on our planet is in fact DNA, and the most critical role human beings play in in the preservation and transmission of DNA from one generation to the next." So, in fact, the purpose of human beings is to preserve the presence and survival of DNA in the world through transmitting DNA through procreation, creating generations of human beings that carry DNA forward. In other words, we are simply "Carriers" or "Messengers" of DNA. A rather humbling thought, particularly for those of us whose world/life view is homo sapiens-centric, believing that we are at the top of the food chain of all life forms on Earth.

What is quite interesting is that, within cells and organisms, DNA itself uses "messengers" in the form of Messenger RNA (mRNA). mRNA carries the genetic information copied from DNA in the form of a series of three base code "words," each of which specifies a specific amino acid. The process of making mRNA from DNA is called transcription. So, what is the "Message" that DNA contains and mRNA carries? Quite simply, mRNA carries codes from the DNA in the nucleus to sites of protein synthesis in the cytoplasm (the ribosomes) to create proteins that direct all the functions of every life form on the planet (including us, as perhaps the most complex and advanced life form on Earth).

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An existential role and purpose of human beings: to preserve and transmit wisdom

We are in fact "Human Beings." As human animals we, of course, are ruled by the natural laws of biology and have biological functions, drives, instincts, and perhaps even biological purposes for our existence. But as "Beings," as human beings we are human animals that have taking our biological existence and nature and have created lives that are characterized by values, attitudes, perspectives, meaning, and purpose that we choose and use in the creation of the essence of what makes us human "beings." This "essence" is what makes our lives unique, what allows for self-transcendence and contributes to what we sometimes refer to as our "spirit" or the spiritual–existential domain of our lives. This is why legacy is so important and influential in human culture and civilizations. This is why we have the yearning to understand our place in the universe, where we came from, what our purpose is here, and where we are going after death. The legacy we are given is complex, and it contains values and lessons we either decide to cherish and embrace, or reject. The lives we live, and the values we live our lives by, leave a legacy for others (e.g. our children and grandchildren). We are teachers, all of us. But all teachers are messengers of wisdom, i.e. the transmitter of knowledge and wisdom. Only human beings are "cumulative" learners. We transmit knowledge and wisdom from one generation to the next, and each generation can then build on what's been learned by the previous generation. We stand on each other's shoulders. Einstein could not have developed the Theory of Relativity without what was learned and transmitted by the works of Newton and countless physicists before Einstein. We are messenger human beings. We transmit wisdom, spiritual wisdom, from generation to generation. We transmit the wisdom of love, caring, kindness, compassion, generosity, authenticity, intention, attitude, and perspective. We are all in this together, so that requires connection, empathy, cooperation, and forgiveness. We are all mortal, so we must learn the wisdom that death teaches us the preciousness of life. Or as the "Timekeeper's" mother puts it "It's not how much time you live sweetheart, it's how you live with the time you're given."

The lesson that "Hope is the courage to create an uncertain future." We human beings are also "Messengers of Spiritual Wisdom," and like Hermes, we carry messages of wisdom from our forefathers to pass on to those who must carry on when we are long gone.

> "There are three ways to ultimate success:
> The first way is to be kind.
> The second way is to be kind.
> The third way is to be kind."
> -Rogers (2003)

from It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood.

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