

Listen to those primal urges

By Ruth Ostrow

A FRIEND was chatting nicely with me the other day when she started to get cranky. Things I was saying began to annoy her, then everything seemed to annoy her. Her own life went from being peachy for most of that afternoon to being an unfortunate mess.

"I just don't feel happy," she blurted, in some frantic purge of emotion that seemed to be coming from nowhere. I was busily wondering what was really going on for her when she suddenly jumped up, excused herself and vanished for a good 10 minutes.

When she came back, she was relaxed, smiling again. "Sorry," she said. "It's an indelicate thing to talk about but I always get cranky when I'm constipated. I go from being the sweetest person to being utterly unbearable.

"The longer it goes on for, the darker my mood becomes, until my life seems futile. But the moment I've had a bit of success, everything seems fine again. So just ignore everything I've moaned about this past hour."

And it made perfect sense to me -- the body being clogged up, energy, or as the Chinese call it, chi (life-force), not being able to flow freely into vital areas, toxic matter stagnating in the gut.

And it alerted me to the fact that we don't really listen to our bodies enough, blaming anything external -- social factors, other people, our partners -- for our moods and emotions and fail to take into account the deep impact biology has on everything we feel and do.

Which reminded me of another story I recently heard from a male friend. At dinner he started telling me that he was no longer emotionally tired or irritable and had much more love and patience for his children. "My wife and friends are asking: 'What's happened to you. Are you on happy drugs, are you having an affair?'"

"And the answer is simple. I've started eating meat. I heard that people of my blood group need lots of meat. And although I hate the taste, I'm now full of energy and feel deeply satisfied with life."

I know there are vegetarians who'd give the opposite story, but the point is that we often ignore the language of the body and we rarely acknowledge the link between our bodies and our emotions.

Many of us live as if our bodies don't really exist. We cart them around, demand so much of them, abuse them, impose politically correct regimes on them, then wonder why we feel depressed.

We are taught to take note when things go physically wrong. But we're not encouraged to listen sensitively to our biology as a delicate diagnostic instrument, descending instead into psycho-babble to explain away natural reactions and

feelings. Of course being clogged up would affect mood, as would being iron deficient.

Both males and females experience chemical and hormonal cycles which affect emotion. Many women wonder why they feel down just before menstruation. And yet it's a time when the body -- due to its reproduction imperative -- is unconsciously grieving the loss of a potential pregnancy.

And I would be loath to make important emotional decisions mid-cycle or during ovulation, when I know my body is literally on heat. Female animals emit a scent or pheromones during ovulation that can unconsciously make the whole household crazy and restless.

Which is the point I'm making. Although Western society is in denial about it, fundamentally, we are animals. This doesn't discount the spiritual aspect of our beings. But we must find sacredness in our origins, our roots, our primal behaviours, and see these natural urges as worthy.

For instance, sexual attraction is not strange, anti-social behaviour but stems from the body's directive to procreate and spread its seed. We try always to put our behaviour into tight Judeo-Christian contexts, worshipping reason, logic, psychological theory and ignoring the body's instinctive lower-brain functions. If we view ourselves as animals, then we can better understand various reactions we have, not only to bodily functions but the environment.

A friend told me he suffered from lethargy until he heard about melatonin, a hormone stimulated by light. Perpetual darkness sends people into hibernation, like bears. Spending too long working inside a dark house can have a similar effect. Likewise, the moon's gravitational pull has an effect on the water in our bodies. Full moon can be a powerful time of disruption as the word lunatic suggests, and is why dogs or wolves bay at the moon.

So before jumping to conclusions -- my marriage is bad; I hate my job; I feel trapped -- ask yourself: "Am I constipated; have I eaten enough iron; how full is the moon; am I on heat; are my testosterone levels higher than normal because I'm exercising more?"

Many would say this is too precious. But my body is now the first place I'd go for clues about mood -- before the psychologist, the girlfriend or the anti-depressants. The body is an amazing teacher. But like all students, we've got to be encouraged to sit and take note of nature's wisdom.

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