

The Heart as the Unifying Force

***The Heart Knows the Way. Run in that direction. - Rumi***

From the physical perspective, the heart is a muscular pump that transports iron rich blood throughout the body. There has been much research on the connection between stress, grief, anger and heart disease. A recent [longitudinal study](http://hpq.sagepub.com/content/20/1/60.abstract) found that hopelessness and depression are each predictors of coronary heart disease with hopelessness being the predominant risk factor.

Conversely, there has been a growing body of research studies that link positive emotions to improved well-being. These findings have shown that positive emotions can help one to meet life’s challenges, improve relationships and create good health. Recent research from the Heart Math Institute focuses on the heart itself as a powerful center that when synchronized with the brain can optimize function in the entire body-mind.

The Heart Math Institute has specifically looked at the physiological state that is associated with the feeling of appreciation. They have named this state coherence, which “encompasses a number of related phenomena, including entrainment, synchronization and resonance, all of which emerge from the efficient and harmonious interactions of the body’s subsystems.” They propose that this coherent mode may be the link between positive emotions and the range of favorable health-related, mental and social outcomes documented by a number of research studies. They have found that the brain’s electromagnetic patterns match the input coming from the heart, which affects the nervous system and physical functioning of the body.

Psychologist Carl Jung felt that the heart chakra is the link between the higher or spiritual energy centers and the lower or more human or physical energy centers and is where we can learn to tap into our authentic power. Fear based living often comes from not listening to the knowing that is in our heart. When the heart chakra is balanced and open, it gives us a neutral, integrated and compassionate perspective, which creates harmony and balance in our entire system reshaping old patterns in the nervous system. This place that bridges spirit and matter is where the unfolding of your true nature happens and is the source of your creative potential and soul’s desires. The heart- beat creates an energetic coherence within the self and with others. It is a place of both autonomy and interdependence as a feeling of oneness and connection takes place when operating from the heart.

Many spiritual teachers and disciplines teach about the wisdom of the heart. “Dropping into the heart” is a frequent teaching. What that means is to not give authority to the thoughts that are constantly produced in your brain. By dropping into the heart, a clarity of perception opens up that aligns your authenticity with the universal truth. Through the heart, one has access to Higher Love or Divine Love. This is the energy that manifests self-healing.

Meditation Practice:

Settle on a chair or the floor and relax into your body and become aware of the breath. Simply watch the rising and falling of the chest while you focus on the center of your chest (not the actual physical heart). Bring awareness to the heart center and the breath. If thoughts come, let them come and go and bring attention back to the heart and the breath.

Observe that feelings of love and gratitude naturally emerge when centered in the heart. You can also enhance those feelings by calling to mind someone or something that brings you joy and you are grateful for. Fill your whole Being with these feelings of gratitude. Notice how your mind, body and heart feel.

Call to mind a problem that is concerning you, or simply allow emotions to emerge that you may label as “negative” (there are no negative emotions!). Welcome the emotions to bubble up and be felt as you are still centered in this powerful place of the heart. Embrace your emotions, embrace yourself with compassion. What is the most loving thing you can say to yourself? Sit with this in silence. At the end of the meditation, tune into your heart and ask, what does my heart desire? What do I need in this moment? Is there an action to take? Be guided by the heart, it never steers you wrong!

Please check out Ann Petrus Baker on YouTube or Insight Timer for related meditations of Self-Compassion and Heart-Brain Coherence.

***Only From the heart can you touch the sky - Rumi***