

Living From the Heart
by Rev. Eileen Patra

It has been said that the longest journey we every take in life is the one from the head to the heart, from the outer consciousness to the inner, indwelling Christ consciousness. While Jesus taught us that we should seek first the “Kingdom of Heaven” and all things would be added unto us, we often look first to the outer world, our sense consciousness for answers, nourishment, validation, abundance and so much more.

How do we find the Kingdom? Jesus also taught us that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us so the question becomes, ‘why is this journey so long, so difficult’?

There is a Hindu story about the gods hiding humans’ power. “Where should we hide this great power?” they asked. First it was suggested to hide it in the highest mountains, but it was agreed than man would surely find it there. Then it was suggested that they bury it deep in the ground, but all agreed that it would be found there as well. Finally, it was suggested that they hide this treasure within the human heart for surely, they would never find it there.

I reflected on this story a few weeks ago when I attended the Spirit’s Light Youth & Family Ministry Conference in Chicago. One of the workshops I attended there was called “HeartMath™”. I learned that researchers have discovered that the HEART, is actually more intelligent than the brain. While both organs have their physical functions, the brain is much more focused on preserving the physical body from harm and so does not necessarily assist us in making wise choices.

For instance, I may be in a situation where someone is yelling and my brain associates “yelling” with something in my past that caused me physical harm. The brain will tell me to run, shut down, and avoid conflict at all costs. The heart however may recognize that this situation is not the same as the one in my past. This person is “yelling” to get my attention – perhaps to keep me from stepping in front of a moving car that I did not see – or perhaps because the point they need to share with me is vital and they are afraid I will not hear them. Now, this is not to say that we should accept inappropriate behavior from others, it simply means that situations in the present moment are often clouded by past experience or the sense consciousness striving to survive over the spiritual or true self.

The longest journey we ever take is from the head to the heart and yet – we need only turn in that direction to quickly experience the power and wisdom within. In the story of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, we learn that just touching his hem brought her close enough to Jesus to experience healing. When we look to the metaphysical meaning of the story, we see that Jesus represents our Christ consciousness or indwelling divine power. The woman who has been ill for many years, hemorrhaging or bleeding for many years simply touches the hem or the outer edges of the Christ consciousness and she is healed. So it is for us too, that we need only turn inward briefly and just touch on that inner power to experience healing, wisdom and peace.

In the HeartMath™ workshop at the Spirit's Light Conference, our first exercise was called Quick Coherence. This tool which brings the heart rate and brain waves into "coherence" translates as a way to quickly touch that inner peace and allow it to change our energy, to change the focus of our thoughts and feelings.

The steps to Quick Coherence were simple and I came up with an acronym that I felt would help me remember the steps; "Step BAC".

1. **STEP** or stop and take a step in the journey toward the heart
2. **B**reathe – Focus attention on the heart and imagine yourself to "breathe" through the heart
3. **A**ppreciate – Think of something that brings you joy or a sense of appreciation
4. **C**ontinue – Continue to hold the feelings (rather than thoughts) of appreciation

Ultimately, there are two ways to handle every challenging situation in our lives. We can go into fear and anger, fight or flight mode, allowing the brain to direct the outcome, OR we can go to the heart, direct our attention inward to our Christ consciousness and overcome the negative energy or situation with love.

How often in life do we find ourselves in a situation that causes us to lose our positive energy, to hemorrhage like the woman in the story? And how different is the outcome when we reach for the hem – or go within for the power to effectively manage the situation?

In my work as a graphic designer, I often find myself in stressful situations working with clients and with tight deadlines. Recently, I was working on a project that involved creating two backgrounds for PowerPoint presentations, one for each of two locations that the meeting was to be held. The backgrounds were approved and we began production on the presentations. We were given a list of which of the many presentations were to go on which backgrounds and what format, i.e. video format or widescreen format each was to be created in.

Two days into production we learned that one of the backgrounds that had been approved had been eliminated. ALL of the production was to be done on a silver background with black text. Well, we had already created hundreds of slides with white text on a brown/wood texture background! And the deadline was not going to change! Someone on the executive level had neglected to tell the production department about the change.

So, there were two ways I could deal with this situation. I was the lead graphics person on the job and had two other people working with me on the project. I chose . . . to go to the heart. I chose to Step BAC and breathe, focus on appreciation and continue breathing from my heart BEFORE reacting to the situation. The others on the team did not know what I was doing, but they did follow my lead in reacting positively to the challenge. The result was that the changeover went smoothly and quickly, we all kept calm and the executive who had forgotten to tell us about the change came in to personally apologize for the mix-up and brought us chocolate.

Now, I could have responded quite differently. And, I have responded quite differently to similar circumstances. What do you think would have happened if my response had been “That’s not possible! We can’t get that done! How could you forget to tell us?!” What if my energy had come completely from my head with fear and anger? Most likely the rest of the crew would have taken on a similar response, the energy would have been negative, we would have worked slower because our anger and fear would have interfered with our abilities, and quite possibly with the computer equipment. AND most importantly, we might not have gotten chocolate!

So, there two ways to handle a challenging situation; **reacting** from the brain, ego or sense consciousness or **acting** from the heart or Christ consciousness.

And we can go deeper. Remember, Jesus told us to “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of Heaven” and where is the kingdom of heaven? It is within! If the heart is truly more intelligent than the brain, why not ask it what to do?

Often we have difficult choices to make in life and we seek all kinds of outside counsel to help is in making those decisions. We may seek the advice of friend, a counselor, our horoscope ... whatever. And while this may or may not be helpful for certain circumstances, how much more effectively could we make choices if we were to seek our own inner guidance?

We often talk about surrendering choices to God – but that is sometimes difficult. Why? Because we tend to think of God as being outside of ourselves. When we focus on God as outside of ourselves we tend to feel alone and God’s guidance may seem to be elusive. When we remember that God is within us – that the power is hidden in our hearts we have only to make that short journey from the head to the heart.

In the story, the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy is held captive in the wicked witch’s castle. She gathers wisdom (the scarecrow), courage (the lion) and love or the heart (the tin man) and she is set free! Later, as she prepares to return home, Glenda tells her that she has always had to power to go home and she gets there by thinking about home and repeating “there’s no place like home” – and as we all know, “home is where the HEART is!”

So we too have the power to go within to our heart, to seek our own inner guidance and begin living truly from our hearts. The HeartMath™ workshop I attended provided another step that took us from experiencing the peace in our hearts to acquiring the guidance of our hearts.

We started with the “Step BAC” process, take a step, breathe, appreciate, continue, and then we added another step. We asked our hearts “How can I more effectively handle this situation?” And then in the silence, continuing to hold feelings of appreciation, we waited for the answer.

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3. **Appreciate** – Think of something that brings you joy or a sense of appreciation
4. **Continue** – Continue to hold the feelings (rather than thoughts) of appreciation
5. **Ask** “How can I ...”

I found this to be a most effective experience. I heard answers that seemed so obvious yet had been so elusive. I decided that I would use this technique when working with my scheduling conflicts. Whenever I feel stressed about a scheduling choice now I take time to use this exercise to ask my heart if I should take on the extra work or say no.

The heart IS more intelligent than the brain. AND, it is more powerful! The energy center of the heart, the love chakra is a direct connection to the flow of Spirit. When we open that center of energy and allow that love to flow through us we are “in the flow” and we are truly a powerful presence.

Jesus taught us to “Turn the other cheek”. When he taught this lesson he first said that scripture taught an “eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth – but I say if your enemy strikes you on the cheek, turn the other one to him.” This was an Aramaic idiom meaning do not choose to start a fight. What Jesus was teaching here was that what we project is what we experience. This was not a lesson in humility but a lesson in universal law, a lesson in non-resistance. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, but it can be changed; it can be altered and we have the power to change negative energy to positive energy, conflict to peace, anger to love.

Jesus knew for instance when he told his followers “if a man asks you to walk a mile, walk with him two” that the person would then be indebted to them. He was not teaching trickery but teaching the law of non-resistance. Ghandi accomplished unheard of progress in India using this same law of non-resistance. While again, we do not need to accept or encourage abusive behavior, we CAN walk away. We CAN keep our hearts open and allow the loving energy that flows through us to continue to flow and reach out to others. We CAN love our enemies and make a difference in our and lives AND in theirs.

Our energy or spiritual substance extends far beyond our physical bodies. This energy vibrates at a level that mimics our thoughts and feelings. Positive, loving energy vibrates at a higher rate than negative, angry feelings. When we come into proximity of another person, there is an automatic energy exchange. We all experience this. We have sayings for it and have even written songs about it ... we say “Don’t bring me down”. But what we still have to learn, to teach ourselves is that we can only be brought down by allowing ourselves to do so. When someone is in a negative mood or a state of need, they are looking for an energy boost. When you come along in a great mood, they tap into your energy and often they begin to drain your energy. The reason you feel the drain is because you are “RESISTING”. By practicing the law of non-resistance and projecting those feelings of love and appreciation you increase the flow of positive energy to the person seeking your energy AND you increase the flow to yourself as well.

One of my favorite movies is *Gone With The Wind*. Scarlett O’Hara and Rhett Butler are the proverbial star-crossed lovers. While they are a perfect match for one another,

neither can see it when it is most needed. I often wonder what would have happened to them in so many scenes when one was willing to love and the other had chosen to close off their feelings. He would be hopelessly in love with her while she was hopeless in love with Ashley Wilkes. When she first realizes her love for Rhett, he leaves and takes Bonnie with him to England. When he returns, she is ready to make amends and he projects anger and she falls down the stairs. During her ensuing miscarriage Rhett is remorseful, knows how much he loves her and pines over her. When she recovers, she of course thinks he is still angry and so she returns the anger and on and on it goes. They never seem to vibrate at the same rate throughout the movie. While their inability to mend their differences made for an all-time, great movie, their continued anger does make you wonder what might have happened if only... they could have aligned their feelings.

And what if ... what if the person or circumstance causing fear or anxiety in our lives could change for the good. What would life be like if we could sow seeds of love rather than seeds of fear or anger or resentment?

The HeartMath™ workshop offered a third tool, another step in the journey to living from the heart. The third tool was to share the love, the joyful appreciative feelings with others. In other words, projecting the loving energy to others.

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4. **Continue** – Continue to hold the feelings (rather than thoughts) of appreciation
5. **Project** – project the feelings to others, in the room, in your mind’s eye, beyond...

What person or situation in your life would benefit from your projecting love and appreciation to it? The Kingdom of God, the Power of God is within you! You have only to turn the corner and touch the hem of the garment, the outer edges of your heart, the outer edges of your Christ consciousness to experience the kingdom. As we embark on this week to come, let us begin that journey from the head to the heart. As we travel that road more frequently the distance becomes less, the path more direct.

At every disturbance to your peace, every conflict, go immediately to that heart space, breathe through the heart and bring your attention to feelings of joy and appreciation. From there, the power to make wise choices ... the power to express love and peace over fear and chaos ... the power to change negative energy to positive energy ... the power to truly live from the heart is only breath away.