

The Mind and the Heart

At one level or another each of us is aware of thoughts, beliefs, memories, anticipations, hopes, dreams, fears, and images, to give but a few examples of the constituents of what we call the mind. What the mind may be apart from such constituents we do not know and cannot find. Each of us is aware that we have numerous and often conflicting emotions such as infatuation, anger, fear, happiness, unhappiness, and so forth, which are usually associated with the heart. It is important to note at the outset that True Teachers distinguish between the lower and the Higher mind, and between fleeting emotions and feelings as deep as the currents in the ocean depths. Thus, in discussing the mind and the heart we are in effect speaking of four topics. We are taught that in this age, called Kali Yuga, the age of darkness, most human beings are centered in the lower mind and in their fleeting, ever changing emotions. That this is the case is readily apparent to anyone contemplating the current condition of humanity. We are also taught that the individual and the collective manifest states are the direct reflection and expression of individual and collective inner conditions. Thus, the world as we experience it is a world of effects, not causes. The effects noted reflect the current conditions of the minds and hearts of humanity. Should one desire to change these conditions, the only remedy would lie in changing the minds and hearts of human beings. Attempting to change external conditions alone has never proven to be an effective solution to the world's problems. In the twentieth century, perhaps the most visible example of this awareness lies in the teachings and in the life of Mahatma Gandhi who taught that lasting solutions could be arrived at only through non-violence which is a state of mind and heart and not merely the lack of visible, external force. He also, having tired of the phrase non-violence, stated that what he called non-violence was in fact love, which he called "a soul-force," an internal condition of mind and heart requiring years of study, meditation, and "experiments with truth." These experiments consisted in one's attempts to put the fundamental teachings of all great Teachers into practice in one's life. This, he found from his own experience, cannot be done without revolutionary changes in one's mind, in one's heart. It is most thought provoking, given the sadness of the human condition and the fact that it is manifestation of what have been called "internal relations," to consider the nineteenth century statement of a sage who said, "Give me one

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hundred true men and women and I will change the world.” This statement implies that a small amount of pure light can dispel vast darknesses. In this lies great hope for mankind. It is interesting to note that when Gandhi needed to change a particularly volatile situation through non-violent action, he would take with him only those followers who themselves had become non-violent in heart and mind. Anything less, he taught, would fail to change the oppressive conditions being addressed. In a word, people, like most animals, can sense non-violence, love, or its opposite. Thus, simply acting without violence and saying nice words will never be an effective method of radical social change. He taught that the means is the end. Therefore, violence leads to violence, love to love. What was called “the last Great War” and believed to be true turned out, alas, to be anything but. Why are we raising these points? Because they pertain directly to beginning to understand the mind and the heart. This understanding cannot be garnered from books or from the words of others, although both can be helpful. In the end, the mind and the heart can be understood only from within one’s self, through one’s own experiments with truth, one’s own tapas (self-suffering) and through some form of spiritual practice. Ultimately, Gandhi and Raghavan Iyer, to mention only two, have taught the need at certain critical points for the taking of vows, which Gandhi referred to as “right angles.” Thus, to access the Higher mind and the deeper heart is a process requiring a way. Clearly, such a process is itself not contemplated without sufficient causal conditions, without an awareness of the need and the possibility. Sometimes such a causal condition is referred to as “a moment of clarity.” Lacking this, unless one comes to it naturally, there will not be the search for love, wisdom, and compassion, will not be the desire for self-transcendence in the service of True Teachers and what they have called “our poor orphan humanity.” We hope here to provide some points of contact to those who seek to tread the Path itself and not merely to believe in or to talk about it. All such points are being passed along as they themselves were received through others.

Let us first consider what we usually call the mind. We are directly aware of its contents, mentioned above. We use the term mind, if we think about it, so to speak, as a locator for its contents. That is to say, we seem to need to posit a location for the phenomena we experience. We say they are occurring in the mind. Upon further

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consideration, however, we discover that while we experience the content, we do not experience the alleged mind in which the content is occurring. Why is this? Perhaps we are not deep enough thinkers? So, why not try to experience the mind apart from its contents? No matter how hard we try, the alleged mind remains elusive. Is this because we are not using the correct approach? Or, might it be because the concept mind is but a convenient fiction? We tend to assume that if something exists it must exist somewhere, in some location. Thoughts exist, therefore, we assume they must have a spatial-temporal location. But this location we cannot experience. This had led some students of the mind to deny its existence altogether, reducing the phenomena experienced to mere electromagnetic activities in the brain which can be experienced, although not by one's self, anymore than one can see one's own eyebrows. Such students, therefore, hold that with the death of the body and its brain consciousness ceases. This approach is called reductionism, reducing all mental phenomena to brain activity. Yet, not only from the teachings of the wise but also from the testimony of many who have had near-death experiences who have been pronounced dead and have revived we are told that consciousness continues without a break after the death of the body and its brain. Who then are we to believe? Is there not some way we can answer this question for ourselves? If the wise have always taught the eternity of consciousness, why should we not seriously investigate this teaching?

Once we discover that we cannot experience the mind per se, and at the same time are aware that the wise speak of mind, we must either stick with our lack of this experience, or we must consider that the mind of which the wise speak is different from a mere container of thoughts, images, and sensations. The question thus arises: if mind does exist, what is it, where is it, and is there one mind per body or is there, as the wise have taught, one mind? We might be given fertile food for thought in an early statement to be found in the small devotional book, "The Voice of the Silence", dedicated to the few, by H.P. Blavatsky, namely "The Mind is the Great Slayer of the Real. Let the Disciple slay the Slayer." This is where the book (and the Path) begins. What we call our mind and its ever-changing contents are spiritually considered, the veil between God and us the Self, Allah or by whichever name one chooses to call the mysterious unknown.

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Thus our minds, however brilliant, cannot lead us to what St. Martain referred to as “the Mind beyond all minds.” Thus, not only is the mind not to be equated with brain activity, but also must at some point along the way come to be seen as that which must be overcome, surrendered. This runs counter to what many of us have been taught. It is, in fact, roughly the opposite. Lao Tzu teaches “Learning is acquired through daily addition; the Tao (God, Self, Allah) is acquired through daily subtraction.” It would seem, then, that to gain access to the true Mind (to the Higher Mind) we need to let go rather than to hang on to what we consider to be our mind. At the same time, as Jesus taught, “It takes a thorn to remove a thorn.” Paradoxically, it takes the mind to slay the mind. Independent of existential experience, this line of thought seems senseless. Since it is the line of thought suggested by the wise, however, it may be worthy of serious, sustained consideration through thought, and by beginning to more closely observe our minds; beginning the attempt to gain control over their activities so that we are not mere passive recipients of their contents. One of our first observations will be to see that our thoughts and other mental contents happen to us rather than being the product of our choices. Since our objective is to gain control of the mind and its functions in order to emanate positive helpful thoughts, and to, in fact, transcend the lower mind at will, we will easily see the need for a practice that will make these things possible for us. Our first attempts may be somewhat discouraging when we realize the degree to which we lack control of our minds. This in turn can lead us to see the need for the development of the ability to sustain our will. To begin to apply our will to the activities of the mind is to begin to be active rather than passive in relation to it. This is the beginning of the way towards accessing the Higher Mind that has been occluded by the automatic, self-perpetuating activities of the lower mind. With patient practice, we can move towards choosing every thought the full attainment of which marks a critical juncture upon the Path. It is interesting to ponder, from our current mental conditions, the state of consciousness prevailing in a being capable of choosing every thought when no thought is being chosen. Such ponderings lead us, in time, to the notion of Shunyata or voidness. This idea is also denoted in the Buddhist conception of no-mind pure awareness. Those who have attained this ability chose a thought only as and when necessary and appropriate. Far from being

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abstract, such beings manifest a child-like nature, having regained “the child-state we have lost.” Should we find these states difficult to imagine, we need only find a very young child to watch at play manifesting the phenomenon of no-mind. An ancient Zen Buddhist Master wrote, “Before I began my search for enlightenment, mountains were mountains and rivers were rivers. All during my long search for enlightenment, mountains were no longer mountains and rivers were no longer rivers. After achieving enlightenment, mountains were again mountains and once again rivers were rivers.”

As one begins to gain intuitive glimpses of what is called the Higher Mind, the realization comes that the objects of its attention are completely impersonal, universal, timeless, and changeless. The most accessible example, for most of us, is mathematics. Plato used mathematics as his example of functioning on the level he called thinking, which he distinguished from belief that is subject to change. The defining characteristic of this thinking is what has been called “self-reproductive thought,” that is to say thought without a thinker. Even one’s initial, perhaps limited, experience of the Higher Mind will enable one to begin to understand the Ecclesiastical statement: “There is nothing new under the sun.” Such experience will also help one to understand why the teachings of the wise are always at their heart the same.

At the same time, we do not want to oversimplify our discussion of the mind. We are taught that there are seven planes of existence, each consisting of seven sub-planes. This would apply to any ongoing discussion of the mind and its many levels of functioning. These planes and sub-planes must not be thought of as being stacked atop one another, so-to-speak, but rather as being contained within one another, as being consubstantial with one another. We are encouraged to understand such matters through the use of analogy and correspondence. Applied to the planes and sub-planes one might think of the tones and sub-tones of the musical scale or our awareness that each primary color is contained within any one primary color. So while we consider these teachings regarding the mind, let us not lose track of the fact that we are, in effect, only at the threshold of its existential understanding.

We now move to the discussion of the heart. We are all familiar with phrases pertaining to the heart: my heartthrob, my broken heart, heart-felt sympathy, I left my

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heart in..., deep in the heart of..., the “heart” of the matter. These are easily understood idiomatic usages. However, on a more fundamental level the wise distinguish between the doctrine of the Eye and the doctrine of the Heart. The former applies to assuming that sense experience provides knowledge. The latter teaches that true knowledge comes only through the heart. Again, reasoning through analogy and correspondence, one could consider the role and relation of the heart to the rest of the body. Science has yet to understand the source of its regularized beating, let alone the causes of its failure to beat. Thomas Carlyle speaks of “the Great Antique Heart,” his way of characterizing the ultimate essence of reality. Buddha taught: “The heart of things is sweet.” We have all witnessed this sweetness in young children and some elders, who seem to wish only to give.

As with the mind, the heart can, ultimately, be understood on seven planes and sub-planes. If we have also been taught to understand “from within without, from above below,” we will be led to deeply ponder That of which our heart is the physical manifestation, that Heart which beats at the invisible center of the cosmos and of ourselves.

To speak of the lower aspects of the heart is to consider emotions such as: fear, anger, jealousy, hatred, and the like. These represent the wounded heart whether in this or in previous incarnations. The heart, like a pellucid crystal vase, can be exquisite in its glossy hardness yet it is quite fragile. This fragility is revealed in such emotions as just mentioned. Ancient cultures acknowledged this in their manner of treating and raising young children. Modern psychologists speak of lasting effects of the formative years. This has much to do with the heart. Given proper nourishment and teaching even the wounded heart can be healed. This is to say that there is hope for one and all—no matter how damaged. Some people seem to naturally possess, without nurturing what is called a good heart, kindness towards all. Most of us, however, need to uncover our hearts through diligence grounded in a desire to help others. The Heart Doctrine, spoken of, for example, in *The Voice of the Silence*, is rooted in what the Buddhists refer to as *bodhichitta*, the seed of desire to aid in the enlightenment of all mankind. Central to this doctrine is the teaching of the illusory nature of one’s sense of separateness from others.

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In the same text this sense is referred to as “the great, dire heresy of separateness” the only sin in the ancient teachings: the root of all subsequent sin or evil.

To begin to inculcate the Doctrine of the Heart is to courageously face and overcome one’s constrictive types of fear, of needless self-protection, is to gradually become more expansive, more inclusive in one’s deeper feelings. It becomes necessary to renounce all lesser allegiances, to become what Socrates called “a citizen of the world.” To thus “join the human race” is more difficult than one may initially imagine. As in the effort to master the lower mind, one will discover internal impediments to gaining the expansive heart, especially if one’s heart has been wounded. Nonetheless, as mentioned, there is hope for everyone, for anyone who wishes can move one’s heart towards the heart of all humanity. In undertaking this sacred endeavor there is little room for negative self-judgment, itself but the flip side of ego aggrandizement. One seeks only to do the best one can and knows how each day, giving one’s self credit where due and noting areas requiring further efforts. This endeavor to expand the heart’s deeper feelings has nothing in common with a naïve Pollyannaism, a false optimism. Raghavan Iyer taught: “One must seek to make the heart intelligent, the mind compassionate.” This is an example of the need for what he called “re-inverting the inversions.” The intelligent heart can unreservedly serve “Those” whose hearts embrace all of humanity, with all of its sufferings and who yet never lose heart or hope for all. It is both a great privilege and a valuable lesson in humility to imagine remaining aware of the vastness of human suffering without losing heart or hope. To serve such beings is the greatest boon possible in the human condition. Such service is most valuable in the form of one’s own self-transformation, self-regeneration, both of which can only occur from within without, from above below. If one finds this path too difficult or not in accord with one’s current condition, one can serve in many other manners. As has been said, “they also serve who only stand and wait” “readiness is all.”

The deeper, more expansive the feelings, the closer is one coming to “the dwarf in the heart,” the fearless dwarf radiating love and light to all, one with the omnipresent essential light and love at the heart of reality. Even Freud, who acknowledged he was afraid of the mysteries, acknowledged the reality of “an oceanic feeling in the heart.”

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Should one be fortunate enough to experience such a feeling, one is forever thereafter altered; one will never be the same. The choice, perhaps the critical moment of choice is whether to follow the path leading towards more extensive moments in the service of all or whether to flee, to return to the comfortable, to the familiar. To choose the path of renunciation, of the heart, requires both love and courage for we are choosing to step away from the familiar, even if it were uncomfortable. We may also feel we do not have what it takes, that we have fallen too far to redeem ourselves while at the same time knowing we cannot be redeemed from without. It is at such times we may be helped by the following statement found in The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous: “No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see that our experience can be of benefit to others.” There is not a human being incapable of self-redemption. It is about belief, courage, and hope coupled with the willingness to persevere. One of the Buddha’s Arhats sometimes called “Fingers,” an enlightened being in his own right due to practicing Buddha’s teachings had been his village’s mad-man and terror, wearing a necklace of human fingers around his neck. When he heard the Buddha teach, he knew he wanted to become one of Buddha’s pupils. He expressed this desire to the Buddha. He was told that he was welcome to become a pupil, but that he first had to return to his village and allow the villagers their revenge. This he did, was badly beaten, survived, and became one of the Buddha’s closest pupils. This vividly illustrates the above teaching from The Big Book. Whatever have been one’s sufferings, the time will come when sharing them with others can bring hope to what otherwise seems hopeless, can bring light to what otherwise seems darkness. This is a direct expression of the Heart Doctrine in action.

We now need to consider the relations of the mind and heart to the doctrine of karma. Our discussion thus far has been somewhat theoretical. We need to ground it through a discussion of karma as a role in each of our lives. Keeping it simple, karma can be seen as the universal law of cause and effect, operating on all planes of manifest existence. Looking at karma from the other end, so-to-speak, it is a doctrine in which there can be no uncaused event. This is to say, for example, that there is no such thing as a miracle. What some call miracles are, in fact, the effects of causes unknown. True

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Teachers tell us that our thinking and our speaking are the primary causes of our karma. There are said to be three classes of karma relevant to each of us. There is the karma currently operating in our lives. There is unexpended karma we carry but for which there is no current matrix for its expression. Thirdly, there is the karma we have made and are making in this lifetime. This doctrine also leads to the idea that there are no accidents, no coincidences. This is not to imply that such things are easily seen or understood. If pondered, however, it will result in a new way of viewing human existence, individual and collective. There is said to be individual, familial, national and global collective karma. Each of these affects all of us to some degree. Our internal relations, our place of birth, our parents, all that we encounter are the results of causes we ourselves have made in previous lives, as well as in this incarnation. While not being discussed in this essay, karma and reincarnation are referred to as the twin doctrines neither can be understood without the other.

What does karma have to do with the mind and the heart, one may ask. The living mathematics constituting the condition of our mind, of our heart is a function of causes we have previously made. The wise teach, less one begin to think this is sounding somewhat like determinism, that each individual is born with what can be called a maximum curve for that incarnation, limiting its possibilities. It is also taught that it is a rare human being who, in the words of Raghavan Iyer, “maximizes his curve.” Thus, while there are self-created limits in a given lifetime, few of us ever reach them. There is always room for greater actualization of potential. This is the true basis of hope for one and all, silently sidestepping pollyannaism. If one examines, in detail, the teachings of the wise in any tradition, one will discover that while there is a general teaching, the teaching given to individual pupils varies greatly. This is because the karmic conditions of the mind and heart of each is, in fact, unique. Sometimes these teachings appear to contradict one another. This can be shown in the following, taken from one of the Buddhist sutras.

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A man came to the Buddha asking to be a pupil. The Buddha welcomed him asking him to have a seat in the corner of the room. Another man came in and asked the Buddha, “If I hear of a teaching that I like, should I put it into practice immediately?”

The Buddha replied, “Yes, by all means.” The man departed thanking the Buddha.

Another man came in asking the same question. The Buddha replied, “No, you should give it great thought before deciding to practice it.” He, too, thanked the Buddha and departed.

At this point the man who had been sitting quietly in the corner asked the Buddha, “Why did you give opposite answers to the same question?” The Buddha replied, “The first man has great difficulty putting any teaching into practice. Therefore, I advised him to practice any teaching that speaks to him immediately. The second man adopts spiritual practices impulsively and does not stay with them. Therefore, I advised him to give any newly suggested practice deep thought.”

Far from being contradictory, this accounting is an example of what Buddhism refers to as skillful means. What will aid one configuration of mind and heart may well hinder another. Any teacher of any subject or art is aware that different pupils require different treatment if they are to do their best. Emerson, fully aware of these matters stated, “Consistency is the hobgoblin of simple minds.” On another level, the poet Byron defined genius as “the ability to simultaneously entertain an idea and its opposite.”

Lacking the presence of a teacher, each can through self-study and the study of which ever great scriptures speak to one approximate the teaching relevant and applicable to one’s current condition of heart and mind, neither expecting too little and thus not challenging one’s self, nor aiming too high, which leads only to certain failure. William Q. Judge addresses this issue in an article entitled “Hit the Mark.” Raghavan Iyer emphasizes the need for objectivity, fearlessness, and rigorous self-honesty in this undertaking. Lest we become somewhat confused, we can bring to mind a statement

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from one of the Mahatmas, “He who does the best he can, and knows how, does enough for us.”

“Self-knowledge is of loving deeds the child.”

(The Voice of the Silence)

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