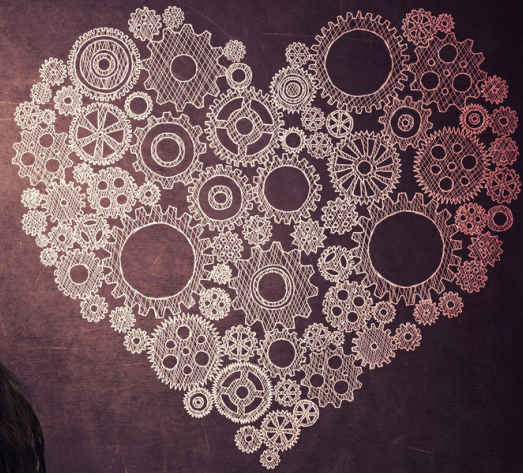
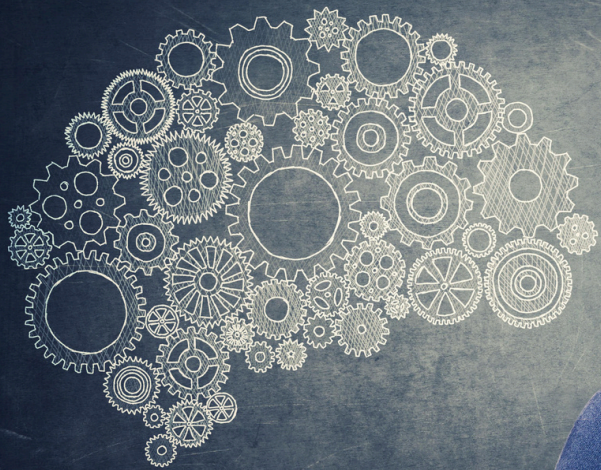


The Dichotomy of the Mind & the Heart

By Archana Samarth





We seem to live in a world of dichotomies, a world where sharply contrasting ideas exist. For example, we can say that with all the modern technological breakthroughs, humanity is advancing and yet, we can also say that there is regression of human values as evident in the strife, separation, poverty, malnourishment and disease of both the mind and body that are prevalent in the world today. This is closely related to, and perhaps is an outcome of another fundamental dichotomy of our times, that of the heart and the mind.

The heart says one thing and the mind another, causing confusion and conflict about which is right. Whom should we listen to? This can be seen among some youth for example, on the brink of making a career choice, *should I pursue what truly interests me, or would it be right to do what is considered to be more prestigious and financially rewarding?*

In the times we live, the mind, considered to be the most developed aspect of us, is given preference, and we do strongly identify with the mind. We tend to follow the philosophical dictum, "**I think therefore I am,**" attributed to the 17th century French philosopher, Rene Descartes. This suggests that our thoughts, opinions, preferences and also our prejudices make us who we are. The heart, on the other hand is considered emotional, irrational, fickle, unreliable and weaker of the two. This identification of the intellectual self is reinforced in our society right from childhood. But the question persists, is this all there is to us, OR, is there more to our identity?

Let us explore the true nature of both the heart and mind, to see if in understanding them better, we can learn to optimise the use of these tools so that they serve us as they were meant to do.

The Nature of the Mind

Thoughts, opinions, beliefs, analysis, reasoning, reflection, are all the activities of the mind. And, thinking is perhaps the mind's most used tool. We are thinking all the time: with consciousness and sometimes with less or no consciousness. BUT, do we really know *How to think*? Choices that we later regret, paralysing doubts, and opinions not founded on facts suggest that we don't necessarily use this faculty in the best way possible.

The ability to think and choose is a unique mental opportunity that only we humans have! We can plan, organise and use logic to analyse information. This allows us to take charge of ourselves and give direction to our lives. There are however common barriers to correct thinking, traps that most of us have fallen into at some point or the other:

A common trap is of fanciful thinking i.e. when we do not take into consideration pertinent factors. An everyday example of this would be, when we reach late for an appointment, it is perhaps because we have not accounted for the traffic, an external reality, and underestimated the time taken to reach the destination. Jumping to conclusions and judging without gathering facts, is a human tendency which can lead to impulsive reactions that we later regret. Our thinking can sometimes be self-centred, i.e. we view situations only from our own perspective without taking into consideration another point of view and thus limiting ourselves. A contrasting tendency is to be easily influenced by others as in the case of peer or societal influence, or herd mentality ("Others are doing it so it must be right"). This could lead us to taking wrong decisions even while sensing that we are being unauthentic.

Sometimes, accumulated anger and resentment lead to the tendency to get trapped in the same thoughts again and again, in a circular and unconstructive way. These mental habits are quite common and suggest that we don't always use our mind in the most effective manner.

The mind is a marvellous tool, a gift for mankind that sets us apart from animals, but we need to develop it in a conscious, knowing manner. We need to learn to use our mind by bringing order to our cluttered thoughts, to clarify our ideas by questioning, investigating and allowing reason to guide them. To work with our mind in a conscious rather than a habitual manner.



One can bring more consciousness to the way our mind works by

- learning to work with order, priorities and time i.e. mental discipline.
- having a real dialogue, a true exchange of thoughts and ideas by being willing to listen and understand what others are saying to us.
- reducing the focus on unpleasant bad memories and negative thoughts so as to allow space for new ideas and recognise the opportunities of the present.
- leading our mind rather than allowing it be scattered. As Lord Krishna says in the Bhagvad Gita, "wherever and whenever the mind wanders, due to its flickering and unsteady nature, we must bring it back under the control of the Self" and, that the mind can be controlled by constant "practice and detachment."

How do we practice detachment? By developing a more wholistic view of life. A philosophical perspective that helps us to know our true nature and who we can be. To recognise how our mind works, to look at it in an objective and detached manner rather than be completely ruled by it.

The Nature of Heart:

We can say there's more to the heart than we may know, or think.

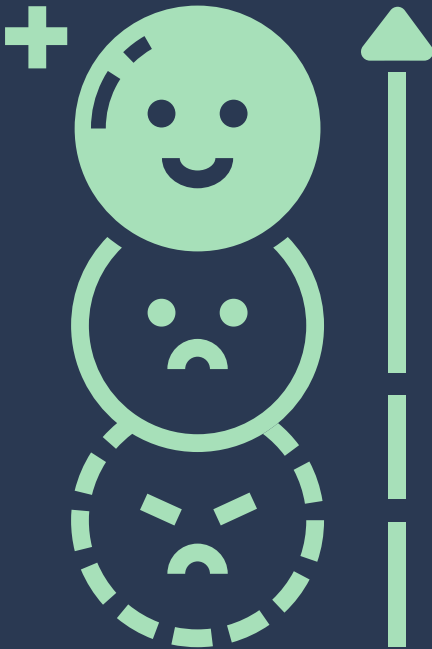
From a scientific and physiological point of view, the heart is in the centre of the body and from there it transmits the vitality of blood in all directions. From a metaphysical point of view, the heart is compared to the sun in the Solar System. From a philosophical point of view, the heart is considered to be the seat of moral consciousness, and of intelligence, intuition and spirituality.

Modern Medicine is beginning to recognise the concept of the "Heart brain". In 1991 Dr Armour discovered that that the heart has its own "little brain" that can learn, remember, and even feel and sense. (1) This suggests that science is only NOW gradually catching up with what ancient wisdom already knew!

"The heart is the abode of the Spiritual Man, whereas the Psycho-Intellectual Man dwells in the head..."

- Helena Blavatsky





“there are feelings which wrinkle the face and the soul and there are feelings that endow them with the brilliance of youth.”

Numerous ancient sacred texts call upon disciples to preserve the purity of their hearts. This not only refers to the purity of feelings, but also implies the wide range of actions which Siddhartha Gautama once proposed through the Noble Eightfold Path: Right words, actions, intentions, thoughts, efforts, livelihood, attention and concentration.

How can we Purify the Heart? By understanding the nature of our psychological realms and dealing with them accordingly. Emotions are sudden and intense reactions which can change as swiftly as they come, like a storm. Hence, decisions based on strong emotions are often not stable or sustainable. Moreover, feelings of resentment, guilt, envy, hatred etc trap us and hijack our ability to view people and situations with a clear mind. In contrast, Sentiments such as compassion, gratitude, courage etc are feelings which are deeper, more stable and lasting. They also bring out the best in us. It is said that **“there are feelings which wrinkle the face and the soul and there are feelings that endow them with the brilliance of youth.”** (2)

To purify the heart means to free it from the tangles of turbulent emotions and nurture complementary sentiments from the higher realms of ourselves. This means, to consciously evoke in ourselves Courage in the face of Fear, Tolerance instead of Anger, to correct and redeem ourselves instead of agonizing with Guilt, and to overcome Selfish impulses with Generosity. This may sound difficult but is possible when we are determined to be the best of who we can be.

Integrating the Heart and Mind

We can conclude that both the heart and the mind are essential for us in their own unique ways. When we learn to work with both of them in a conscious manner, we can express the best of what they have to offer, and can begin to recognise our true potential. To address the dichotomy mentioned in the beginning, it's not a question of Heart OR Mind. We need to lead our lives with the Heart AND the Mind.

What the world needs today is this unified approach; whether in medicine where specialists come together and offer a wholistic treatment rather than just organ specific intervention; or on the social front, where communities need to come together and learn to coexist harmoniously. What is needed, is to harmonise the voices of our heart with our mind: **The heart gives the direction, and the mind executes it.**

“Your heart knows the way. Run in that direction.” Rumi

To integrate the heart and mind requires a union of our thoughts, our purest emotions (sentiments) and our highest aspirations (values, ideals), with all three converging into action. Working with them in a fragmented manner leads to a distorted and superficial approach. To come closer to our highest human potential means endeavouring to come closer to the archetypes of Beauty, Goodness, Truth and Justice. This requires the Heart and Mind to walk hand-in-hand, in unison and in harmony. ☺☺

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