

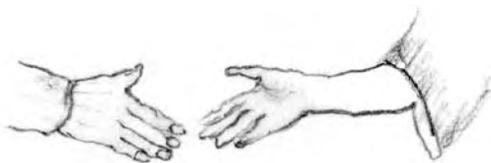


Cheerful Mediator: The Heart

The Persian poet Hafiz wrote: “Your heart and my heart / Are very, very old friends.” Even as we go about our sometimes jangled and dissonant lives, we resonate with one another. Whenever our hearts meet warmly, their circulating power permeates our whole selves with a reassuring sense of well-being. When we meet someone who lives fully in the heart’s majestic realm, we naturally feel awe and gratitude. At the other extreme, those whose hearts seem cold or empty tend to be puzzling or frightening.

Place your right hand slightly to the left of your breastbone to sense the four chambers of your heart enjoying life together. Blood that is low in oxygen pours into the right atrium, the right ventricle, and then into the lungs to recharge with oxygen. Returning to the left atrium, oxygen-rich blood gathers momentum in the lower left ventricle to spread out into the thousands of miles of arteries, veins, and capillaries in your body. Tilted slightly forward, this especially hardy and active left ventricle inspires the phrase “I mean this from the bottom of my heart.” Heartfelt positive thoughts and feelings churning through the chambers of our hearts awaken us to its primordial sunny magnitude and origins. Like every organ, the heart is embraced by celestial influences and carries profound memories of its evolutionary journey. During embryonic development, the earliest form of the human heart floats above the forming head, like a miniaturized version of the Sun above the Earth. Only gradually does the embryonic heart descend inside the fetus, to beat with its intimate and dependable warm inner radiance.

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), meridians, or energy lines, run throughout the entire human body. These energy lines are not unlike energetic currents, often referred to as



A Warm Handshake

“ley lines,” that crisscross the globe. Expanding the usual Western image of the work of the heart within the body, the TCM perception of the heart includes cosmic energy moving through the body that is not wholly dependent on the physical heart and blood circulation. Chinese physicians perceive the heart meridian as an energy channel that

radiates through the heart downward under the arms and across the inner elbows into the palms of our hands and the inside tip of our little fingers.

A warm handshake and a story do wonders to strengthen the heart. As we meet others with a vigorous handshake or clasp our own hands together, warmth streams through our arms. We may feel the heart’s energy filling us with good will. As we shall see throughout this book, such seemingly simple gestures as a handshake release specific energy patterns. Through increasingly relaxed and alert body awareness, the energy patterns of each organ territory of body and soul presented in this book will become familiar to you. As they do, you will recognize them in yourself and in others with increasing empathy, like sunlight illuminates an outer landscape.

Heart-strong folk are sanctuaries of comforting acceptance. They imbue others with the warmth that circulates so strongly within them. As they resonate with the task at hand, their serenity helps to bring about negotiations and flowing reconciliations. One evening I found myself unexpectedly in the presence of an enlightened guru and was astonished to find my heart growing gently synchronous with his. After a time, it seemed that my heart contained every human being who has ever been, with ample room to spare.

The inner circulation of heart-strong people gives them embracing, well-rounded perspectives. In stressful or dangerous situations, these folk tend to remain levelheaded, and to speak with calm honesty. As they resonate with the heart’s mission to bring sturdy, harmonious flow to life within them and for others and their natural surroundings, they gravitate



The Heart Meridian

toward body-based work, meditation, and relaxation techniques. They tend to generate heartfelt utopian visions.

THE STRIVING HEART

Kirk, an elderly friend, manifests a well-developed heart personality and physiognomy. When Kirk retired from his college career at age seventy, he felt called to become a storyteller. In his athletic youth, with his strong chest and muscular arms and his love for physical strength, he gave himself to his beloved American ideals and signed up to be a U.S. Marine. Yet active service in Korea soon caused him to feel revulsion for himself and his fellow soldiers.

When Kirk returned to the United States after his soul-wrenching combat duty was over, he resolved to transmute his anger and become a warrior for peace for the remainder of his life. He became a college professor, at the same time working as a counselor, volunteering in hospices to help the dying and their families, in battered women's shelters, and with families suffering from AIDS.

I was in the audience when Kirk told his first story in public. Soon after he had emerged from major heart surgery, he resolved to explore storytelling and learn to express all the caring warmth he felt in his heart. His charisma and his tale opened the hearts of everyone in the auditorium. When he finished, we all sat back, deeply moved. Encouraged by our response, he soon began to speak about "throwaway" people and others he wanted to rescue by weaving them into stories. Whenever he told his tales, an atmosphere of compassion and love pervaded the room. He soon found other venues for his stories, and his confidence grew.

Several months later, Kirk was among the people who came to my home to explore storytelling as a healing art. He gradually learned to trust the whole group. On the day of the final group presentations, Kirk waited, listening to the others. He had decided to tell the story that as a soldier had most devastated his heart, and wanted to wait until it was pitch-dark outside. The former marine began to speak in the candlelit room, and in the course of his story, he screamed forth a horrifying rape scene he had witnessed. After fifty years, the experience that had been suppressed so long within him pierced through the darkness to the stars.

This was a turning point for Kirk. He had liberated his heart's story of bitter disappointment and rage at his comrades and himself. Afterward he found that for the first time he was able to feel new and profound compassion for himself and for other veterans. Kirk now contributes to group therapy sessions in veteran hospitals. When he tells his tales, he sits sturdily on a stool. Through his presence and gestures, his pauses and repetitions, powerful yet gentle heart forces stream forth to all who listen. On Kirk's answering machine, his outgoing message offers an expansive sense of time: "Leave your message. There's no rush. You can turn time into a flower." He wants to help everyone prevent heart problems.

THE WISE HEART

Countless stories convey the reconciling, stabilizing wisdom of the heart, and encourage the heart's steady warmth and vigor. All our organs confer and work together, constantly in touch with one another, yet separate and individual. They play cooperatively like musical instruments in an endless concert. A tale from Borneo portrays the heart in conversation with some of our other vital organs.



Who is More Important?

A very long time ago, when all the parts of the body were just beginning to get together, they gathered for a conference. They were trying to decide which was most important.

The eyes were the first to speak. They said, "It is clear that we see into everything. We recognize what is coming. We are the ones who perceive the truth."

Said the ears, "We are more important."

"You? What about me?" said the mouth. "Everything comes through my door."

"Fools," said the feet. "We carry you everywhere."

"What about me?" said the nose.

"Let's face it," said the sexual organs. "If it weren't for us, you wouldn't be sitting here at all."

On and on went the debate. The different parts of the body argued amongst themselves for long days and nights. Finally, all the parts were exhausted. Then they heard a voice that seemed to come from very far and also very near, inside all the other voices. They recognized it as their own, and yet not their own. It whispered and also thundered within them.

"My brother and sisters, have you forgotten my pleasure in your existence?" This was the voice of the heart speaking. "How can we exist without any one of us?"

All the other voices knew that what the heart had spoken was true, and they were filled with joy and peace.



FOLLOWING THE HEART

A healthy heart generates comforting physical strength. It paces itself, and does not rush. It shapes our physiognomy and sense of direction, and also influences our speech. A hard-working woman decided to walk for three weeks during the summer along an old pilgrimage route on the coast of Spain. Over many stressful years, she had acquired polyps on her vocal cords, and speaking was very painful. Now she sensed her need to revisit her past in order to release anger pent

up within her, which she had absorbed from her troubled family. Carrying only a light duffel, she went alone.

“My body wanted to feel the truth. My brain wanted to know the whole story,” she explained.

She walked steadily. Her heart filled with fresh energy. After a week, a ferocious temper fit discharged from deep within. Soon afterward, a refreshing melody sang through her. She was amazed to hear herself singing simple words of love. As her heart opened, more and more fragments of the family saga that had been suppressed were reconciled within her. By the third week, her throat felt better. She had found a fresh speaking voice and, as she walked along, many songs flowed freely through her.

EARTH’S HEARTBEAT

Through the ages, conditions that stress both individual and communal hearts continuously call for healing story and song. How can we encourage the harmonizing strength of the heart to speak more fully and more often?



Fences or Bridges

Two friends who had been neighbors for years had an argument and stopped talking to one another. Soon afterward, one of them found a kind-looking young man on his doorstep, carrying a box of tools.

“Do you have any jobs I can help you with?” he asked.

The man decided to trust him. “See that wide ditch? My neighbor plowed it deep between his property and mine, and flooded it from his upper pond. I want you to go out there and build me a tall fence so I won’t have to look at his property any more.”

Then the man set out to get some supplies in town. When he returned at sunset, his eyes opened wide and his mouth fell open. There, instead of a fence, stood a bridge spanning the ditch. It even had handrails.

His neighbor crossed the bridge with both hands outstretched and said, “What a fellow you are to mend our friendship with a bridge.”

As the carpenter put his tools in the box and hoisted them onto his shoulder, both neighbors begged:

“Why don’t you stay?”

“I’d like to,” he replied, “but there are so many more bridges to build.”

Over the years, the friends took time to cross over and visit one another, and to keep their bridge in good repair.



Not long ago, human beings expressed the rhythms of their hearts more organically than we do today. They experienced the sun as a warm drumbeat within them. In present-day culture, it is increasingly challenging to find the way into these healthy rhythms, yet many storytellers and musicians succeed. I was recently introduced to a drum made out of wood cut from an old tree. This tree had been chosen because its trunk had grown indented into a heart shape. The Native Americans who stretched white deerskin over this huge mother heart drum meet regularly with friends to drum, chant, and share their stories.

Among the tales cherished by the Cherokee nation, one tells about love turned to anger and then restored through powers beyond ordinary means.



Strawberries

Long ago, in the early world, there lived the first man and the first woman. They lived together as husband and wife, and they loved one another dearly. But one day they quarreled. Although neither could remember the reason later, the pain grew stronger with every word that was spoken, until finally, in anger and in grief, the woman left their home and began walking away to the east, toward the rising sun.

The man sat alone in his house. The anger left him and all that remained was terrible grief and despair.

A spirit heard the man crying and took pity on him. The spirit said, “Man, I have seen your woman walking to the east toward the rising sun.”

The man went after his wife, but he could not overtake her. Everyone knows that an angry woman walks fast.

“I will go ahead and see if I can slow her steps,” said the spirit, who soon found the woman walking, her footsteps fast and angry and her gaze fixed straight ahead.

There was pain in her heart. The spirit saw some huckleberry bushes growing along the trail, and made the bushes burst into bloom and ripen into fruit. But the woman’s gaze remained fixed. Her footsteps didn’t slow. She looked neither right nor left, and she didn’t see the berries.

The spirit caused the trees of the forest to burst into bloom one by one and ripen into fruit. But the woman’s eyes remained fixed, and still she saw nothing but her anger and pain. Then the spirit caused a green carpet to grow along the trail starred with tiny white flowers, and each flower ripened gradually into a berry that was the color and shape of the human heart. As the woman walked, she crushed the tiny berries beneath her feet. Their delicious aroma rose to her nostrils. She stopped and looked down, and she saw the berries. She picked one and ate it, and she discovered its taste was as sweet as love itself.

So she began walking slowly, picking berries as she went, and as she leaned down to pick them, after a time she saw her husband coming behind her. The anger had gone from her heart. All that remained was the love she had always known. So she stopped for him, and together they picked and ate the fruit. Finally, they returned to their home, with a new taste of peace and happiness.



Some of the finest European tales collected by the Brothers Grimm portray the transformational power of the heart. Enlightened storytellers sought to strengthen the hearts of their listeners through rhythmic plotlines. Though the hero of “The Queen Bee” is teased and called a “simpleton,” nothing stops him from heeding the sunny generosity of his own heart.



The Queen Bee

In the early part of the story, Simpleton is dozing and making music peacefully by the home stove, yet he misses his older brothers who have left home. He senses they are struggling in the great world without him. At last he finds them and the three brothers begin traveling along together.

Soon their footsteps bring them to an anthill. The two elder brothers want to see the little ants scurrying in terror, carrying their eggs away. But the youngest brother says: “Leave the creatures in peace. I will not allow you to disturb them.” Then the brothers go onward and reach a lake where a great number of ducks are swimming. The two older brothers want to catch a couple of ducks and roast them for dinner, but Simpleton says: “Leave the creatures in peace. I will not suffer you to kill them.” At length they come to a bees’ nest in which there is so much honey that it is running down the tree trunk. The elder brothers want to make a fire beneath the tree to suffocate the bees in order to take the honey, but their simple brother again stops them, saying, “Leave the creatures in peace. I will not allow you to burn them.”

The three travelers arrive at a castle where stone horses are standing in stone stables and where nothing is moving with life. They go through all the empty halls of the castle until they come to a door with three locks. In the middle of this door is a little window-pane, through which they see a gray-haired old man sitting at a table. They call him once, twice, but he does not hear. When they call him for the third time, he gets up and opens the locks. He wordlessly conducts them to a handsomely spread table, and after they have eaten and drunk, he beckons them to sleep. Next morning the little old man shows the eldest brother a stone table, on which three tasks are inscribed: Find all the princess’s pearls, find the golden key to her chamber, and choose from three sleeping princesses

the one who can best rule the realm. Completion of these tasks, according to the stone inscription, will deliver the castle from its enchantment.

Neither of the older brothers is able to succeed with even the first task and both become lifeless stone statues, joining countless other gray statues in the chilly stone halls of the castle. Finally, it is Simpleton's turn to try the tasks. He seats himself on a stone and weeps, thinking that what his brothers could not accomplish, he will not be unable to accomplish either. But soon, to his wonderment, the king of the ants whose life he saved from his brothers' cruelty comes with five thousand ants and, before long, the little creatures have got all the pearls together in a heap. The second task, finding the key to the bedchamber of the king's daughters, also seems impossible to Simpleton because the key is at the bottom of a lake and he does not know how to swim. Yet when Simpleton comes to the lake, the ducks he saved from his brothers' greed dive down and bring the lost golden key to him. The most difficult task remains: identifying which of the three sleeping daughters of the king shall be the true queen. The queen of the bees whose nest Simpleton saved from fire helps him discover his true bride.

And so the whole castle is delivered from its enchantment, and those who had been turned to stone return to life. Simpleton marries the princess whose heart is most pure, and after her father's death, they rule together. His two brothers marry her two sisters.



Like many a heart-centered story that churns our feelings in the direction of love, "The Queen Bee" skillfully dramatizes the blood's circulation through the four chambers of the heart. The whole story moves steadily in a recurring rhythm of three trials resolving like the fourth beat in a musical phrase. The anthill is the first testing place for the three brothers, the duck pond the second trial, the honey hive the third. Simpleton's strong will and loving kindness bring the brothers safely through these trials.

Without intending to, we can lose touch with our heart's trusty rhythmic flow. Disappointed and hurt by our fellow human beings, we may retreat into stony slumber or fume with anger. Yet as the gray embattled castle of the mind lets go, pure childlike innocence can freely radiate its sunny warmth.

TRANSFORMATIONAL STORYTELLING

Heart Affirmation

My heart is filled with a ceaseless song of love.

Basic Heart Story Dynamic

Anger becomes unconditional love.

Heart Protagonists and Antagonists

Heart protagonists (characters who support heart health) are unconditionally loving, majestic, unprejudiced, and cheerful. They are given to timely, warm, and wholehearted action to support others.

Heart antagonists (characters who express heart dysfunction) are whiney. They avoid conflict and are excessively concerned with comfort. They can be angry, passive, slothful, and oblivious of others.

Basic Story Elements

Myths and stories often resonate with specific internal processes. This reliable pattern invokes well-being and resilience in every cell of your body:

Setting Out: The protagonist sets out in quest of greater love, strength, justice, wisdom, and happiness.

Trouble: One or more obstacles and/or antagonists interfere with the journey.

Help: Wise and benevolent help comes, often giving a gift.

Positive Ending: The protagonist fulfils the quest with joy and celebration.

SUMMONING YOUR STORYTELLER

Heart-strong storytellers plant themselves before their audience like sturdy oaks. Their presence is a transfusion of kindness that strengthens the inner circulations of their listeners. These storytellers are robust and warm, like an oven full of baking bread. They tend to clothe themselves with wholesome simplicity and to receive their audiences gratefully, hoping for listeners as openhearted as they are. Their tales strengthen compassion and hope; their speech and their gestures are measured and rhythmic. They may gesture before they speak, opening the way for compassion and confidence to pulse and circulate, just as blood vessels open the way for blood to pulse and circulate throughout the body. The voices of heart-strong storytellers are reassuring, conveying a mood of comforting ease. As they open the heart, they invite the smart and busy mind to rest.

Exercises to Explore and Balance the Heart

Focus on the organ and its meridian lines. Practice openness. Shifts of awareness can happen on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels as you explore stories connected with each organic territory and awaken your own storytelling abilities.

Let your heart speak. Allow yourself a peaceful space of time. Sit down with a piece of paper and write out these lines: “I am your heart. For years I have been wanting to speak with you.” Listen well to your heart and write down what you hear it saying.

Reflect on areas of your life in which your heart feels at home. Invite your heart into one of those areas from which it feels excluded. As the poet Rumi wrote: “Everything has to do with loving or not loving.”

Heart story dynamics. If someone is deprived of love, the heart sends messages to the whole body. Imagine a character who lives in its strong, gentle rhythmic beat and sway and is peacefully journeying through a sunny landscape. Even a brief imagination of healthy heart energies can liberate energy that may have been blocked for years, and release healing pulses. Hearts contract and withdraw when they sense love is lacking. Protective shadows gathered around the heart can be expressed as an antagonistic dozy character who avoids conflict. Tired and discouraged hearts lack suppleness. They bump lethargically without a sense of direction. In loveless circumstances, the heart can collapse painfully or slowly break. All of these heart conditions can be portrayed through your story characters.

In a two- or three-minute story, let a heart-strong protagonist and a dysfunctional antagonist meet. Surprise your mind. For example, you might imagine a hearty traveler whose way is blocked by a conclave of dull giants or chilly robots. Antagonists in stories and in life stimulate positive action. As your story continues, let help come to support your protagonist. Although your mind may resist this positive plotline, let love, warmth, and joy triumph at the end of your story.

Every day, news stories challenge and devastate our hearts. Yet as we summon the storyteller who lives within us, we can create and live stories in which heartbreak turns in a more positive direction. Although events shatter love, hearts mysteriously mend. To feel the authority of human resilience within you, try this for yourself: At the end of a difficult day, light a candle. Seek a feeling of heartfelt warmth for a few moments; then tell a story to yourself, your family, or a friend or two. The language of heart stories is usually straightforward, sturdy, and compassionate, as in the examples you have read in this chapter. Enjoy the rhythmic warmth and regularity of which your voice is capable. As your words synchronize with your heart, unexpected feeling might arise and radiate. Tap your foot slowly to regulate the pace of your speaking, or use your hands or beat a tambourine or drum.

Shape characters to strengthen the heart. Perhaps you know someone who, like Kirk, the troubled soldier in this chapter, is quietly consumed with rage at world conditions. Create for this person a story that transforms rage into powerful compassion.

Portray the light of your heart in a story. A well-known Middle Eastern tale tells of a traveler who comes in a dark forest to a cottage full of candles. A very old man welcomes him, saying, “Here live the souls of all people.”

“Then may I see my own soul?” asks the traveler amidst all the glowing light.

The old man shows him a lamp that burns with only a wisp of flame. The traveler tries to snatch another's oil, but the old man gently restrains him. "The lamp will glow brighter when you strengthen your heart."

Then the cottage disappears and the traveler resumes his journey with new resolve. Continue this story.

Personal and community development. Imagine a person whose heart has been taken hostage and hidden away, like the Tin Man's in L. Frank Baum's *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz*. Describe the chill in its absence. Create an adventure story to rescue this heart and restore it to its rightful place.

Synchronize and strengthen the heart in a group. To explore and strengthen the heart's four chambers that continuously function together, work in a group of four. Commune with your own internal music and its universal rhythms. As you place your fingertips on neck or wrist to feel the pulse beat of your blood, a sense of harmony will build in the group. As the heart gathers strength, listening opens. Gradually synchronize your pulses, swaying and perhaps drumming on thighs and chests. Slowly rise up as a group to dance. Then sit down again, taking turns to create a story in which a heart is sorely challenged, yet prevails against all opposition and thrives. First let your inner storyteller present you with a protagonist who embodies the heart's strengths. Take this character triumphantly through three obstacles, like Simpleton does in "The Queen Bee." As each member of the group contributes to this adventure, the others hum, clap, softly tap, or drum to keep rhythm as the story unfolds.

Speak from the heart. You may already be experiencing how stories open a sense of connection between yourself and others and bring light to negativity, as when sunlight dispels darkness. Parents often ask me how to bring out painful family stories for their children. I tell them that no matter how many problems their family group carries, speak from the heart. Children listen for our feelings and attitudes at least as much as to our words. They are watchful to see how we connect with our feelings as we tell them about ourselves and others.

The heart's holiness. In many ways, this book is a manual for love. To express the heart's realm, I often go to a large heart-shaped pond near my home. Imagine, create or locate a space to which you can go to honor the heart's wisdom.

EXPANDING HEART AWARENESS THROUGH DANCE, MUSIC, AND YOGA

Dance

Turning ceremoniously to north, east, south, and west, pound your feet as if to a steady drumbeat. Then stand firmly grounded and reach out with your arms and hands to embrace the whole world. Open your palms wide and radiate energy outward from your heart center through all your fingers as you press your heels down. Place your hands together at your heart and breathe

in and out slowly. Relaxed full-body breathing allows the heart's warmth to rise into consciousness as it opens more fully. Now slowly lift your hands straight upward to the twelve o'clock position and then allow them to descend to your sides as if your arms and hands are warm, radiating beams of sunlight. Turn these basic gestures into an ongoing dance built on a rhythmic base of four beats. Include all the directions in your dance.

Music

Pachelbel, Canon in D Major

Handel, Air from *Water Music*

Bach, Arioso from Cantata no. 156

Mendelssohn, Wedding March from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Leonard Bernstein, "One Hand, One Heart" from *West Side Story*

Yoga asanas (Sanskrit names in italics)

Full-Body Breathing (*Pranayama*)

Downward Facing Dog (*Adho Mukha Svanasana*)

Sun Salutation (*Suryanamaskar*)

