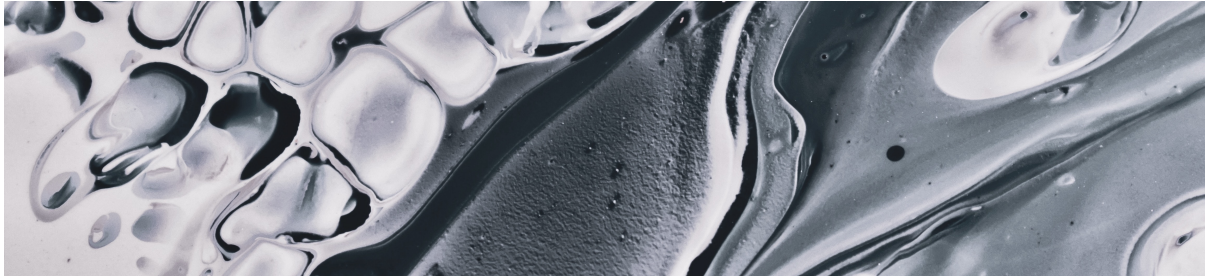


Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

ZCSD Newsletter

July-August 2021



The Voice of the Heart

Someone wrote in an email to me recently, "Grief is rich." It can be. And the same for experiencing the heart-intelligence, or heartmind, I feel.

"Relying on Heartmind" is a verse we regularly recite here at the Center. This comes from a much longer work by the Third Ancestor called "Faith in Mind." My understanding is that the Chinese word for "mind" includes the heart. So "Faith in Mind" translates into faith in heart-mind or "Relying on Heartmind." I like to refer to it as heart-intelligence.

This spirit of the heart is reflected in our bodily heart. Research has shown that our physical heart includes some neuron-like structures much like the brain's, with a lot of connections to the brain, and that the heart generates electro-magnetic energy at a level that far exceeds that of any other organ in the body.

Some of the most moving, the richest, times in this life are what I have come to call "heart events." The heart events I most

September Sesshin

Applications are being accepted for the online September sesshin which will be held from September 3–6. You can apply [here](#) if you would like to participate (full time or part time).

[Announcements](#)

[Sesshin Application](#)

*To stay with our
shaking, broken-
hearted
hopelessness is
our path of
awakening.
Sticking with the
uncertainty,
getting so we
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midst of chaos,
and not*

remember these days are the death of my father, then a few years later, my mother's death. Sometimes a spontaneous, relatively small event will touch us deeply, maybe to the point of tears. A heart event.

*panic—this is
our path.*

The warmth, the strength, the necessity, the effect, the call of the heart, can be undeniable. The first really memorable time I experienced this was at the death of my father. The heartmind called for complete presence. There was no argument. I'd never experienced anything like it.

Recently my brother Rob, in Michigan, was diagnosed with lung cancer. He's never smoked but has spent time for years around agricultural chemicals. Though we may try to figure it out, there it is. Reality—cancer. The proper treatment is still being considered. I find there is a sadness—for my brother, and to some extent, for us all. My niece is almost disabled by anxiety and sometimes panic attacks that are slow to resolve. Here are some realities of this being human. But there can be a richness in there.

Especially after my recent visit to family in Michigan, I'm hearing and feeling, a bit more, the voice of the heart. The call to open to our connections, our unity, the more-essential. To allow the experience of the heartmind more deeply.

I see in myself sometimes a challenge in fully experiencing grief or allowing the heart to fully open in this present moment. Old conditioning may make the trust and openness necessary for that healing experience difficult. Some of these things may need their time to be revealed and resolved. Patience and perseverance are of importance.

Joko (founding teacher of Zen Center San Diego) once told a Buddhist story of a

woman named Sono who was known far and wide for her wisdom and devotion to practice. A man once came to see her and asked, "What can I do to put my heart at rest?" She said to him, "Every morning and every evening, and with whatever happens to you, say 'Thanks for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever.'"

This is a practice in surrender, or letting go. Joko said more about this: "It doesn't mean not to handle life, but you're not fighting its flow. If you're in a turbulent stream, and there's a big log heading at you, you would turn the log aside if you can. But there's no extra tension, no resistance to the overall flow." Thanks for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever.

Of course it's OK if we have complaints—the practice is to apply awareness, and be honest.

How do we encourage making the heart more available to us? Some things come to mind for me. You may have your own take on an effective heart-oriented practice.

The heart is strong and will speak to us if we have some openness, if we have some intention to hear and feel. Connecting physically, bodily, and with awareness can lead to the "heart-presence" being more available. There may be feelings of connection, warmth, and well-being. Daily placing the hands over the heart-space (the chest area) and breathing into the heart-space is a practice for me. Attending to what we may come to see as barriers to heartfulness may help to bring down those barriers. For instance, we can be clearer on how often we are thrown out of the now by thoughts of exclusion or separation, and are less often simply present and open to the voice of the heart. Certain words or phrases can be helpful. I use these two: "May I live

the open heart,” and “May we together live the open heart.”

And let’s not judge ourselves if we don’t feel anything. There’s always the possibility that there’s something going on that we don’t really know about that can move us along this path.

It seems that at our edge is where we might most deeply meet our heart, as this is where we are more open. Sometimes we use the phrase, “Not knowing is most intimate.” We’re always looking for solutions. In her book, *When Things Fall Apart*, Pema Chödrön speaks of how things don’t really get solved—they come together, then they fall apart, then they come together, then they fall apart. Healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen—room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.

We might think something will bring us pleasure, but it doesn’t. We think something will bring us misery, but it doesn’t. When there’s a big disappointment, we don’t know if that’s the end of the story. It may be just the beginning of a great adventure. Letting there be room for not knowing is of importance.

She tells us, “The spiritual journey is not about heaven and finally getting to a place that’s really swell. In fact, that way of looking at things is what keeps us miserable. Thinking that we can find some lasting pleasure and avoid pain is what in Buddhism is called *samsara*, a hopeless cycle that goes round and round endlessly and causes us to suffer greatly.”

“...suffering is inevitable for human beings as long as we believe that things last—that they don’t disintegrate, that they can be counted on to satisfy our hunger for

security.”

So, practice is about staying on the brink, staying on that ‘icy couch.’ Allowing ourselves to experience what it is to be there. To stay with our shaking, broken-hearted hopelessness is our path of awakening. Sticking with the uncertainty, getting so we can relax in the midst of chaos, and not panic—this is our path. Not running away, though part of us would like to. We can experience our unwillingness, our resistance, and yet persevere. It’s an amazing grace, in a way, that perseverance—perhaps from a knowing that we don’t know we know.

A last quote from Pema: “Life is a good teacher and a good friend. Things are always in transition, if we could only realize it. Nothing ever sums itself up in the way that we like to dream about. The off-center, in-between state is an ideal situation, a situation in which we don’t get caught and we can open our hearts and minds beyond limit. It’s a very tender, nonaggressive, open-ended state of affairs.”

—Chuck Sweet

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Pema Chödrön