

*More than a pump, or the seat of sentimentality, or the place that feels broken after the love affair is over, the heart is a center of intelligence within us. It has the capacity to increase our physiological, spiritual, and emotional well-being, and it has an important role in our evolving consciousness!*

# The Transformative Power of the Heart

Janet Carol Ryan

In 1997, while immersed in my studies of the Science of Mind and training to become a licensed practitioner, I came across an article that sent shivers of recognition through me. The article, which appeared in a health and wellness magazine, was entitled “A Change of Heart Changes Everything.” As I read about the work of a research institute nestled in the Santa Cruz Mountains and the emerging understanding of the importance of the heart as a pathway into decreased stress, increased well-being, and higher levels of creativity and consciousness, I heard my inner voice say, “You are to learn this.”

The HeartMath Institute was applying science to show the link between the head and the heart. And the link is even more powerful than we think. HeartMath was demonstrating not only that a shift into heart-focus could affect the physiology of the body and improve outcomes in creative thought, but also that the heart has much to say about how we can evolve and become resilient in times of stress as we open to more positive possibilities.

Following the intuitive lead, I went to the institute for a seminar to learn how to make the shift into the heart. Along with the other participants, I discovered that a few moments of heart-focused breathing and the intentional recall of positive emotion changed my heart rhythms into a more coherent pattern, which was immediately shown on a computer monitor. There was evidence in front of me that going into my heart and feeling gratitude and appreciation had a measurable benefit. In addition, these practices, over time, help decrease stress and contribute to an open state of flow and creativity.

In the years since, HeartMath has become a leading voice for creating a profound shift in unlikely places. Working within corporations, school systems, prisons, and even the military, HeartMath

has found that these tools work irrespective of faith, cultural background, or age.

With two decades of scientific research and direct application of heart-centering practices that change our physiology and our ability to access higher-order thinking and emotional resilience, HeartMath is clearly demonstrating the body/mind/spirit connection.

### The Heart Does a Body Good

Research has illuminated that the heart plays a particularly important role in our physical as well as emotional well-being. As the most powerful generator of rhythmic information patterns in the human body, the heart not only pumps blood, but also transmits complex patterns of neurological, hormonal, and electromagnetic information to the brain and throughout the body.

Coherence, in any system, is a state of efficiency in which everything works together in an orderly and synergistic manner. A common dictionary definition is “the quality of being logically integrated, consistent, and intelligible.” Similarly, our thoughts and emotional states can be considered “coherent” or “incoherent.” Positive emotions such as love or appreciation can be described as coherent states,

whereas negative feelings such as anger, anxiety, or frustration are examples of incoherent states. Focusing on the heart and recalling positive feelings create a state of coherence in which these vital functions of the body/mind enter a state of flow and ease rather than stress and depletion.

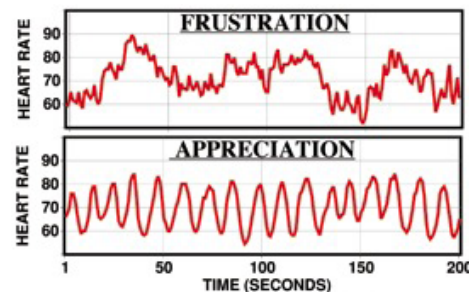
*Going to the heart is more than a metaphor.* The effect is like flipping a switch and resetting the system. In a matter of moments, a stressful response can be converted to a coherent pattern. The positive effect of heart-focus is immediate and can be shown by patterns in the “heart-rate variability”—a measure of the naturally occurring beat-to-beat changes in heart rate/heart rhythms—a method for gauging human health and resiliency.

Changes in the body’s internal chemistry have also been demonstrated. As levels of cortisol, the “stress hormone” decrease, and DHEA, known as the “vitality hormone” increase, we become more flexible and able to respond to our life challenges in new ways. Another finding reveals that self-induced feelings of compassion increase the body’s levels of an important immune system antibody, IgA.

Rather than “subtracting” from our vitality with stress-inducing thoughts and emotional

reactions, we can engage the power of the heart and effectively add to resiliency and responsiveness in everyday life. That’s the “math” in HeartMath, the exponential yield that we receive from any investment made in heart-focused awareness.

HeartMath studies have shown that people can increase coherence and achieve physiological and behavioral changes that last. For example, assessments of thousands of people who practiced HeartMath techniques show the impact in just six to nine weeks: a 50 percent drop in fatigue, 46 percent drop in anxiety, 60 percent drop in depression, and 30 percent improvement in sleep.



Institute of HeartMath Research Center

### Children and Stress

Children and youth are experiencing pressures at home and school, as well as unprecedented levels of media and social pressure, all of which contribute to stress and imbalance. HeartMath has created programs

to assist children, families, and educators to connect with the heart’s intelligence in order to enhance learning outcomes and provide young people with tools for living. The HeartSmarts Program helps children to identify their emotions, recognize situations that trigger stress, gain communication skills, and learn tools for shifting to the heart. Schools are adopting this program to create classroom environments that are conducive to improvements in learning as well as cooperation and compassion.

### Carry Your Heart in Your Pocket

HeartMath has recently developed a pocket-sized device, called the emWave®, with a built-in sensor that monitors the changes in heart rhythms, which can take place almost instantly when these methods of heart-focus and appreciation are practiced.

The emWave technology enables users to monitor their heart rhythms anywhere, anytime. The emWave reads heart-rate variability providing real-time feedback so that users can shift from stress into more balanced and coherent states.

### Heart Signals

Another fascinating revelation in recent studies conducted by HeartMath involves the role of

the heart in the effect that we have on each other when we are in “sync” with our hearts. It has been established that the heart has a powerful electromagnetic field and its own complex nervous system and circuitry that generates up to an estimated sixty times the electrical amplitude of the brain. The electromagnetic signals that our heart rhythms produce actually can be measured in the brain waves of people around us. It is no wonder that the findings by researchers at HeartMath and elsewhere conclude that the heart has its own organized intelligence network enabling it to act independently, learn, remember, and produce feelings—all attributes that, until recently, were nearly universally held to be solely in the brain’s dominion.

### **Global Coherence— Tracking the Shift**

HeartMath’s programs, tools, and technology are addressing the needs of returning military personnel. Teachers are using age-appropriate materials and games with children to create cooperative, compassionate classroom environments that support holistic learning with the heart.

What happens when a group of like-minded and like-hearted people gather with the intention to share care and compassion for the planet? HeartMath launched

the Global Coherence Initiative for individuals and groups around the world to gather “virtually” for the purpose of sharing “heart coherence” for the benefit of the planet with the intention of

- Increasing personal coherence
- Helping to shift the planetary consciousness baseline from self-centeredness to wholeness care
- Increasing connection and social harmony
- Empowering our ability to navigate through global changes with less stress and more ease
- Empowering environmental responsibility and stewardship of the planet.

To date, 35,000 people around the world have pledged to be part of the initiative.

The Global Coherence Initiative will include an important scientific measurement component. Advanced sensing technology, now being developed at the Institute of HeartMath, provides a means to observe changes in Earth’s magnetic field and test the hypothesis that Earth’s field is affected by mass human emotion, positive or negative. This system will enable a new level of scientific inquiry into the relationship between Earth’s

magnetic field, collective human emotions and behaviors, and planetary changes.

### **The Science of Mind and Heart**

In our Centers for Spiritual Living, we know that our prayers, affirmations, and spiritual practices bring about a higher alignment in consciousness and in the conditions of our lives. We have experienced the impact of coming together in community, whether it is a class on meditation or a gathering of hundreds for the purpose of visioning.

The Global Heart Vision of United Centers for Spiritual Living emerged from the practice of visioning centered in unconditional love and expressed a consciousness of inclusion, wholeness, inspired expression, and creative solutions for the further evolution of humanity and our planet. Within our communities, there is a deep awakening to the power and potential of our philosophy to bring solutions and to co-create a world that works for everyone. As we witness the call to something higher within ourselves individually, in our communities, and around the world, I believe that this call is a message from the heart. ■

### **Attitude Breathing® Technique**

Take five minutes several times a day, whether or not you’re feeling especially stressed, to try these simple steps adapted from the HeartMath Attitude Breathing Technique.

- Focus on your heart as you breathe in.
- Concentrate on a positive feeling or attitude as you breathe out.
- Lock in this new feeling as you continue to breathe it in and out through your heart.

As you become adept at using this HeartMath technique, select new feelings to help you “de-stress” as needed.