

The History of the Heart:  
The Symbol from Ptahhotep to Hallmark

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Like many of the pilgrims who are called to participate in the Great Work, the patients who come into my psychotherapy office arrive with an *aporia*, which is a dilemma, a paradox, something urgent and seemingly unfixable in their life.

In order to serve as the best guide to lead these seekers toward a solution to their life's difficulty, I have devoted my life to asking the same question that the Italian humanist Petrarch asked in his book the *Secretum*: why do people bring about their own unhappiness (Petrarca and Quillen 2003)?

I discovered the key to solving this great problem in the writings of the Chinese Sage Mencius. Among Mencius's many brilliant insights, perhaps his most evocative and stirring was:

Pity the man who has lost his path and does not follow it, and has lost his heart and does not go out and recover it. When people's dogs and chicks are lost they go out and look for them, but when people's hearts – or original nature – are lost, they do not go out and look for them. The principle of self-cultivation consists in nothing but trying to find the lost heart (Yutang 1966, 287).

Like all classic texts, this oracular statement invites us to discover its infinite meanings by asking the questions inherent in it (Gadamer 1977, xxi). The first question asked in this text is: what is the heart?

The symbol of the heart is worthy of study because it fulfills the criteria of being what I call a *yantric* symbol. Yantras are symbols that have the purpose of functioning as “revelatory conduits of cosmic truths” (Yantra, n.d.). They are used for the purpose of realizing what Aristotle called our entelechy, or becoming what we are meant to be (Aristotle 1967, 157).

This fits in with Mencius’s concept of self-cultivation, which can be compared with philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s notion of a phenomenological-hermeneutics (Gadamer 2003, 14). Mencius was part of a hermeneutic tradition whose followers understood that the meeting of text and adept led to far more than the acquisition of knowledge. Beyond this, the Confucians recognized that personal realization occurs, in part, through the devoted study of the classic products of culture, because they promote the moral development of the individual toward the achievement of an optimal humanity, which Mencius defined as ‘finding the heart’ (Mencius 2003, 172).

As such, a devoted participation in the symbol of the heart is central to the self-cultivation that leads to finding the heart.

Around the time that the Sage Mencius lived, a great stirring was occurring in the hearts of humankind. German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883--1969) referred to this time as the Axial Age, where axial means pivotal (The Axial Age, n.d.). With the appearance of Confucius and the writers of the Chinese Classics, *The Four Books*, this awakening certainly occurred at this time in Mencius’s home land, China. Masters of wisdom also appeared at this time in India, Greece, and the Middle East. It was the time of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Lao-Tzu, and Buddha, the

Indian writers of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and Isaiah of the Old Testament, among others. Civilization was flowering. Some of the world's greatest thinking emerged on the nature of the ultimate realities, all contributing to the liberation of the human spirit.

A central contribution of Mencius to the worldly wisdom that emerged at this time was the revelation of the meaning of *hsin* in Chinese philosophy, most accurately translated as heart/mind. Following the translation of Lin Yutang (1966), I refer to this simply as *heart*. Previous to this time in China, including in the writings of Confucius himself, though the heart is named, its meanings were not explored in depth (Mencius 2003, xlv).

When we explore the writings of the masters in other cultures, we discover an amazing fact. The symbol of the heart was not Mencius's alone. It is an image that spans the globe. It has been of monumental significance since man could contemplate the ineffable and the existence of the immaterial in virtually every culture, religion, and philosophy. From the beginning of conscious man recording his experiences, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings in a sophisticated and organized way, he has attempted to convey something essential about himself and the cosmos through the metaphor of the heart. As it appeared virtually simultaneously with writing itself, we can surmise that this symbolic image emerged with the dawn of thought.

To reveal the meaning of Mencius's words on the lost heart requires an in-depth exploration of the symbol of the heart itself. In this paper, in order to not only advance knowledge, but to follow the Mencian hermeneutic process of self-cultivation, we begin by illuminating the meaning of this universal symbol through a survey of its appearance in the wisdom texts from this world-history of heart-ideas.

## Definitions of the Heart

From earliest times, humankind has located soul, spirit, Self, conscience, thought, feeling, compassion, passion, the eternal, and God within this place called the heart.

Though we no longer live in a heart-centered world, the heart remains a numinous symbol, that is, one that has a spiritual quality that appeals to a higher sense. This image pervades our world and still contains many of the meanings that Mencius and other ancient wise ones gave to it. In our exploration of the history of the symbol of the heart, let us begin with some of the contemporary definitions we find in our dictionaries. In *Webster's Revised Unabridged* (s.v. "heart"), some of the meanings include:

The nearest the middle or center; the part most hidden and within; the inmost or most essential part of any body or system; the source of life and motion in any organization; the chief or vital portion; the center of activity, or of energetic or efficient action; as, the heart of a country, of a tree, etc.

Vital part; secret meaning; real intention.

The seat of the affections or sensibilities, collectively or separately, as love, hate, joy, grief, courage, and the like; rarely, the seat of the understanding or will; -- usually in a good sense, when no epithet is expressed; the better or lovelier part of our nature; the spring of all our actions and purposes; the seat of moral life and character; the moral affections and character itself; the individual disposition and character; as, a good, tender, loving, bad, hard, or selfish heart.

The *Concise Oxford Thesaurus* (s.v. "heart") includes:

Emotions: feelings, sentiments; soul, mind, bosom, breast; love, affection, passion.

Compassion: sympathy, humanity, feeling(s), fellow feeling, brotherly love, tenderness,

empathy, understanding; kindness, goodwill.

Enthusiasm: keenness, eagerness, spirit, determination, resolve, purpose, courage, nerve, will power, fortitude; informal guts, spunk.

Centre: middle, hub, core, nucleus, eye, bosom.

Essence: crux, core, nub, root, gist, meat, marrow, pith, substance, kernel; informal nitty-gritty.

Courage: cojones, dauntlessness, guts, mettle, moxie, pluck, resolution, spirit, spunk,chutzpah.

### The Heart in Ancient Civilizations

Historically, the heart was the singular metaphor for what was essential about being human. Besides its physical purposes, it was thought of as the “vital center of being, (the) seat of understanding, memory, and the passions, a sort of microcosm of the self” (Jager 2000, xv, 2).

Whether we look to ancient Egypt, Babylon, or Greece, we find that the heart was a sacred symbol. In Egypt it was associated with the god, Horus. In Babylon it was associated with the god, Bel, and in Greece with Bacchus (Sacred Heart, n.d.).

Long before Mencius wrote his immortal words, the ancient Egyptians considered the heart to be the core of the soul and the seat of emotion, mind, thought, and psyche. When a person died, their heart was weighed in the scales against the feather of *maat*, the principle of truth and justice. If the heart was found to be free of wrongdoing, the person would continue to exist for all time (Hall and Puleston 1996). The heart was then returned to the body. It was the only part of the viscera left by the Egyptians in the mummy, since it was regarded as the indispensable part of the body in eternity (Cirlot 2002, 142).

We find the heart mentioned in the writings of the Egyptian, *Ptahhotep*, the wise vizier who counseled the Pharaoh over 4000 years ago:

He who listens is beloved of god,

He who does not listen is hated by god.

It is the heart which makes of its owner

A listener or a non-listener. (Maxims, n.d.)

Here we see the intimate relationship of listening and heart. What the wise tell us is that in order to find the heart, we need to listen within, listen to the words of the great explorers of self, listen to nature, listen to the divine, and listen in relationship to others.

The heart appeared in the Hindu classics, *The Rig Veda*, written as early as 3700 years ago and *The Upanishads* and *The Bhagavad-Gita* which herald mostly from the great awakening of 2500 years ago. These are the classic wisdom texts of India from which its great spiritual understandings flow. They, too, saw the importance of listening as a means of reaching the heart, which is our source of happiness. “When a man has heard and has understood and, finding the essence, reaches the Inmost, there he finds joy in the Source of joy” (Mascaro 1965, 59).

To these writers, the heart is the unknowable place where the universe is realized in the Self:

In the centre of the castle of Brahman, our own body, there is a small shrine in the form of a lotus-flower, and within can be found a small space. We should find who dwells there, and we should want to know him. And if anyone asks, 'Who is he who dwells in a small shrine in the form of a lotus-flower in the centre of the castle of Brahman? Whom should we want to find and to know' we can answer: The little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and the earth are there, and the sun, and the

moon, and the stars; fire and lightning and winds are there; and all that now is and all that is not: for the whole universe is in Him and He dwells within our heart. (Mascaro 1965, 120)

The symbol of the heart appeared across the world in Greece in the writings of the immortal Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who lived from 384BCE--322BCE. He said that the soul was located in the heart, which was the “acropolis of the body” (Lewes 1864, 179), the center from which everything flowed. He saw the heart as “the locus of spiritual refinement of the vital spirits, as well as the place where the imagination makes its impression available to the intellectual faculty” (Jager 2000, 74).

In other words, our central human capacity for imagination, which is the well-spring of our ability for symbolization, dialectics, and moral thinking, is attributed to the heart.

Though Mencius, a contemporary of Aristotle, was the great Chinese philosopher of the heart, or *hsin*, it was widely considered to be the seat of the intelligence and emotions throughout Asia and is one of the Buddha's Eight Precious Organs (Hall and Puleston 1996, 128).

For the Buddhists, whose doctrines also became popular in the period following the great awakening, the heart was the origin of all: “All things are the result of the heart” (Liang and Wen-Ching 1996, 20).

The ancient Indian science *Kundalini Yoga* aims for the development of higher consciousness (Jung 1999, xxiv). Its philosophers conceive that there are a number of centers of archetypal being and potential located within the person called *chakras*. The fourth *chakra*, or *anahata*, is the *chakra* of the heart. The heart was believed to be the seat in the body of buddhic, spiritual consciousness. It is the guiding, and most important, part of the body. Its cultivation leads to spiritual realization and unity (Chakra, n.d.). Found in the anahata is the divine self,



called the *purusa*. Jung (1999, 39) says that here you find the self beyond ego, the source of individuation.

A classic meditation *mantra*, which is a phrase that is repeated over and over again by the disciple in order to bring about an evolution in consciousness, shows the centrality of the heart in this philosophy, where the meaning of the *mantra* is that the sacred is made manifest in us through our center, our heart. As the contemporary spiritual teacher, Baba Ram Dass (b. 1931) explained it in his inimitable style:

One of the ways of understanding (the meaning of OM mani padme hum) is that OM means, like Brahma, that which is behind it all, the unmanifest Mani means jewel or crystal. Padme means lotus and hum means heart. So, on one level what it means is the entire universe is just like a pure jewel or crystal right in the heart or the center of the lotus flower, which is me, and it is manifest, it comes forth in light, in manifest light, in my own heart. That's one way of interpreting it. You start to say OM mani padme hum and you're thinking "God in unmanifest form is like a jewel in the middle of the lotus, manifest in my heart." You go through that and feel it in your heart - that's one trip.

(Baba Ram Dass 1974, 9)

The heart held a central importance in the Hebraic tradition, found primarily through the Old Testament of the Bible where it is named over a thousand times. It was defined as being the home of ". . . the innermost self, including conscience, memory, and volition." In a quote from Deuteronomy which is at least 2700 years old, God says to the Israelites: "these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart." In a passage from Jeremiah which was written about 600 BCE, God puts the law in his people's hearts by writing it there: "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law

within them, and I will write it upon their hearts. . .” In this sense, the heart is the internal home of the law (Jager 2000, xv, 10 - 11).

In Easton’s *Bible Dictionary* (1897), the Biblical heart is described as “the centre not only of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life.” The heart is the “home of the personal life,” and hence a man is designated, according to his heart, “wise (1 Kings 3:12, etc.), pure (Ps. 24:4; Matt. 5:8, etc.), upright and righteous (Gen. 20:5, 6; Ps. 11:2; 78:72), pious and good (Luke 8:15), etc. The heart is also the seat of the conscience (Rom. 2:15)” (Easton 1897). Easton makes a point to distinguish the heart, in these senses, from the soul.

Significantly, the heart, from the beginning of these Biblical texts, is considered:

. . . naturally wicked (Gen. 8:21), and hence it contaminates the whole life and character (Matt. 12:34; 15:18; comp. Eccl. 8:11; Ps. 73:7). Hence the heart must be changed, regenerated (Ezek. 36:26; 11:19; Ps. 51:10-14), before a man can willingly obey God.

The process of salvation begins in the heart by the believing reception of the testimony of God, while the rejection of that testimony hardens the heart (Ps. 95:8; Prov. 28:14; 2 Chr. 36:13). (Easton 1897)

This is in contrast to the Mencian and humanistic view that humans are intrinsically good. From this perspective, the finding of the heart is a return to a natural way of being. In this view, people do not need to be changed, they need instead to ‘become’ what they in actuality ‘are.’ In addition, no external intercession by a divine authority is necessary.

As the Bible can be interpreted in multifarious ways, this negative view is somewhat contradicted elsewhere in Deuteronomy, where it was stated that it was possible to know and follow the commandments of God because the law was not something that came from outside of us but was intimately connected to who we were. It was as close as the heart:

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. (Deut. 30:11-14)

In the classical Latin world, the word heart was *cor*, where we find the etymology of heart as *core*. In this civilization the heart was a symbol for thought, memory, mind, soul, and spirit, as well as for the seat of intelligence, volition, character, and the emotions. These meanings passed into the Christian world and the Romance languages (Jager 2000, xv).

We find the metaphor of the heart as the center of humanness in the writings of the early Christian, Paul the Apostle. He saw the heart as the home of a person’s thinking, feeling, and acting being (Jager 2000, 12).

Paul suggests an awareness of interiority, a sense of some whole, inmost self. In other words, for there to be an inmost self, there needs to be a concept of a human ‘inside,’ and a dimensionality to this insiderness, where there is an ultimate location at the center of this interior which he calls the heart. The heart becomes a symbol of the unlocatable location of the ideal as we naturally are able to conceive of it. This imagined place lives in relief to our personal experience which falls short of this ideal.

When Paul says, “I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:7-8) this relates to the Mencian notion of heart as the place where human nature and universal law, where heaven and earth, find their point of meeting.

For Paul, the inner law is exemplified or known through conscience. For Mencius, the universal law known through the heart is the exquisite suffering of knowing the suffering of others, or empathy. We can see here the difference in the Paulist Christian view (which is in variance with the teachings of Jesus himself, whose message was unconditional love) which is built on guilt, versus the Mencian humanism, which is built on humaneness, or love.

As Paul connects heart to sin, the main difference between his Christian conception and the Mencian one is the same as that between Mencius and his opponent, Hsun Tzu, who believed that humans are essentially bad ( Mencius 2003, xx). For Paul, we sin, erasing the knowledge of universal good, or God, and we need to have the heart cleansed. For Mencius, we are good and we lose contact with this original nature as a result of poor cultivation. Mencius believes in an ontological goodness and that our behavior is not a reflection of our essence. For Paul, the opposite is the case which leads to concepts such as badness, shame, and sin.

The *Gnostics*, a diverse group of religious sects that thrived around 2000 years ago, believed that salvation would come if they found *gnosis kardia*, knowledge of the heart, a state of conscious insight whereby one knows deep in one's heart, that one is “in the world, but not of this world” (Meditation, n.d.).

The heart held a central meaning throughout the tradition of esoteric belief systems. In these systems, the heart is the “divinity behind and above and within the physical vehicle” (Global Oneness, n.d.). To quote from *A Dictionary of Symbols* by Juan Eduardo Cirlot and translated by Jack Sage (2002, 142),

For the alchemists, the heart was the image of the sun within man, just as gold was the image of the sun on earth. The importance of love in the mystic doctrine of unity explains how it is that love-symbolism came to be closely linked with heart-symbolism, for to love

is only to experience a force which urges the lover towards a given centre. In emblems, then, the heart signifies love as the centre of illumination and happiness, and this is why it is surmounted by flames, or a cross, or a fleur-de-lis, or a crown.

The heart had its place in the Muslim world as well. The heart appears hundreds of times in *The Qu'ran*, the central religious text of Islam. The heart is most often referred to as covered, hardened, or diseased and needing to be healed, in the sense of coming to believe in Allah (The Koran, n.d.).

The central symbol for the *Sufis* -- a mystic order of *Islam* which began to emerge around the year 700 CE and became the dominant Islamic approach for the next 1200 years (Armstrong 2009, 138) -- is a heart with wings (The International Sufi Movement, n.d.).

*Hazrat Inayat Khan*, (1882 – 1927) the sect's great leader said, "If anybody asks you, 'What is Sufism? What religion is it?' you may answer: 'Sufism is the religion of the heart, the religion in which the most important thing is to seek God in the heart of mankind'" (The Religion of the Heart, n.d.).

### The Christian and Medieval Heart

The heart as a metaphor had a tremendous presence and meaning throughout Christian and European Medieval history. In this iteration, as Eric Jager, scholar and author of *The Book of the Heart* (2000, xv), reveals, there was a strong relationship between the heart and the book. The heart was the source of exegesis, or the process of interpretation that led to a comprehension of the divine, or the hermeneutic discovery of meaning hidden in depth. The heart is the book of the self that needs to be read phenomenologically and interpreted hermeneutically. It is an experiencing of the heart that leads to its self-revelation. This offers us a renewed definition of

the psychotherapeutic process, where an individual brings their life and inscrutable behaviors to us as a book, for us to open, read, resonantly experience, and symbolically interpret.

The heart was thought of by early Christians as the repository of our ingrained habits and our acts. The experience of conscience measured the distance between our acts and God's law. This history of conscience held in the heart is meant to be examined and known as the way to become closer to God's will. This travels all the way back to the Egyptian concept of the heart's cleanliness from sin being its means for achieving eternal existence.

In a parallel to the Mencian notion that the heart symbolizes our original, good, nature, the early Christian sage, Origen of Alexandria (185--254 CE), said that, "For God gave no one a stony heart," (188) and using the story of God hardening the heart of the Pharaoh for his proof, "If this were his condition by nature, what further need was there for his heart to be hardened . . ." (Origen 1869, 168, 188).

Ambrose (339--397), a bishop of Milan who is considered one of the four doctors of the Church, believed that "Law is twofold – natural and written. The natural law is in the heart, the written law on tables. All men are under the natural law" (Dudden 1935, 521--522). In another parallel to the Confucians, he believed that the human quality of the heart is equivalent to the laws to be found in nature and is an embodiment of cosmic, or divine, law, which the Confucians called the Heavenly Mandate. When we live in harmony with this divine law we have 'found our heart.'

Of all the early Christians, the most important in our history of the heart was St. Augustine (354--430), who "transformed the entire consciousness of the Western world" (Hastings, Selbie and Gray 2003, 220). The heart was central in his works and a flaming heart is his attribute (Hall and Puleston 1994, 183).

He believed that God himself was within the heart, the place where “truth is loved.” He named the heart as the location of one’s essential being, saying, “My heart is where I am whatever I am” (St. Augustine 1960, 231). He also intuited the lost heart, and the need to find it again as a means of reuniting with the divine: “Behold where he is: it is wherever truth is known. He is within our very hearts, but our hearts have strayed far from him. Return, you transgressors, to the heart, and cling to him who made you” (St. Augustine 1960, 104).

If Paul was an early Christian explorer of interiority, Augustine was its greatest exemplar. As Jager (2000, 28) puts it, “For Augustine, the inner person and interior life were centered in the “heart,” understood in its biblical sense as the moral and spiritual core of the human being.” Augustine agreed with the other great explorers of the heart who saw it as the center of thinking, feeling, action, imagination, and love.

The *codex*, the original handwritten books that first appeared in the Western world in late antiquity and were the source of exegetic meditation for those of Augustine’s time on, were also seen symbolically as related to the heart. As a container having an interior and an exterior and as an enclosure that could be opened and closed, the codex embodied notions of the heart’s “visible” and “invisible” parts, its “exterior” and “interior” (Jager 2000, 3).

Augustine’s greatest work, his *Confessions*, describes the story of the finding of his lost heart. This culminates in his discovery of the hermeneutic process of self-cultivation. It begins with the resonance to a yantric symbol, which he finds in a Biblical quote. Through this revelatory reading he recognizes that the truth read and found there exists within him, in his heart. This then becomes the impetus for him to explore truth through exegesis of the works of past explorers of the heart, which for him exist in Scripture. Finally this leads him to go into his own heart and express his own version of the truth of the heart.

Augustine's penetrating psychological story also shows us the struggle that emerges from the divided and conflicted aspects of the self. To summarize, Augustine cognitively understood the nature of moral behavior and that his behavior was wrong. However, he knew that if he behaved in the good way, it would be hypocritical, because the behavior would extend from an external understanding, and not from the central location of his heart. He could do the right thing, but as the telling cliché puts it, his "heart wouldn't be in it." He struggled until he found a way for his behavior to come from his authentic being and therefore without struggle.

Augustine's final stage of unifying the aspects of his being is in his telling of his story, the third part of his hermeneutical process. This is a process of "recording." In this remembering, retelling, and making manifest, we see within the word a process of returning (re) to heart (cor). To re-cord is to find the lost heart.

This retrospective self-exploration model is central to the therapeutic one, and was not only followed throughout Western history but is found concretized in the 12 steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous process. We use our own life as the text for interpretation and for contributing to what the philosopher Herder called a *bildung*, a cultural legacy of universal development (Gadamer 2003, 10).

The heart was used as a central conception throughout the monastic and scholastic writings of Christianity in the dark ages. These pathfinders, too, saw the heart as the authentic aspect of our being and the place of our contact with the divine. We see this in the work of the scholar and poet, Alcuin of York (732--804), who said, "Let everything be done in humility and concord . . . not to the eye only but from the heart as in the presence of God" (Browne 1908, 307). He also saw the heart as the place where one could either be illuminated to the truth or be kept from it, paralleling the Mencian notion of the lost, or found, heart.



Like the Indians of the Upanishads, French poet, diplomat, and scholar Peter of Blois (1135--1212) understood that the heart is ultimately unknowable when he said, “Deep and unsearchable is the heart of man, and how can one know it (Jager 2000, 51)?”

The saints often had visions that included the heart and Christian sects manifested symbolic imagery that included the heart. St Teresa of Avila (1515--1582) experienced a vision of an angel piercing her heart with a flaming arrow. A heart with a crown of thorns is the emblem of the Jesuits and their founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491--1556). The “sacred heart” has widely been an object of devotion from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when it became represented by a heart pierced by the nails of the cross and encircled with the crown of thorns (Hall and Puleston 1994, 128).

In contemporary usage, one of the primary symbolic meanings of heart is ardor, either religious and spiritual, or profane and sexual. This second aspect emerged in the poetical works of the troubadours who appeared in the region of what is now southern France in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the work of these poets the heart began to be thought of not only as a place of spiritual discovery, but as the place of erotic, romantic, idealized, secular love. This marked a return to classic themes, from the times of the Romans. Ovid, a pagan writing 2000 years ago in his *Amores* (2001), wrote of the heart as the suffering place of passion.

That’s it: a slender arrow sticks fast in my heart,  
And cruel Love lives there, in my conquered breast.

The medieval notion of the romantic heart, as it was first promoted by the troubadours, is the place of our greatest emotional sensitivity, our compassion transformed into the reverential devotion to another human being taken as the sacred on earth. As such, the beloved is worthy of

the highest treatment. That exquisite emotional quality is the expression of the heart  
(Troubadours, n.d.). As the Poet, Sordello, (1200--1270) wrote,

Love engraved  
Your features in an image  
Cut deeply into my heart,  
And so I've handed myself over,  
To do whatever pleases you,  
Finely and firmly throughout my life. (Jager 2000, 69)

Contemporary marriage theorist and counselor, Harville Hendrix returns to this romantic ideal. In his view, our own healing comes through a devotion to the needs of our marriage partner. In his innovation, this is a mutual commitment between the partners. When both partners live from their hearts in this sense, both get their needs met, and both grow maximally spiritually (Hendrix, n.d.). This presumably new kind of spirituality harkens back to this age of courtly love, when there was a secular religion of romantic love. The heart was inscribed with the devotion to the beloved for all the days of one's life.

In this vision, the exalted woman was the source of finding the heart. As Guillaume IX (1072--1127), considered by some to be the first and one of the best troubadours, (Goldin 1983, 5) wrote:

Since man cannot discover, nor eye  
Behold, nor tongue praise anyone more noble,  
I want to keep her for myself  
To revive the heart within me.

It is in the ability of the chosen woman to recognize what is best in the man, the ability to find the essence, that she finds her power:

But she must pick out what is best in me,

Because she knows: in her alone I shall be restored. (Goldin 1983, 44)

In the symbolism of these poets, the heart became interchangeable with the image of the beloved. One possible interpretation of this feminine image is as a representation of the Jungian archetype of *anima*. In Jung's view the anima is a primary archetype within men. It is symbolized as a woman who holds an uncanny, spiritual feeling. This archetype represents all of the opposite, or feminine, aspects of the male psyche of which the individual remains least aware, or reside in what Jung would call the unconscious. It holds all of the potential for men to grow beyond their masculine ego-identifications. For example, if a man sees himself as rational, concrete, and empirical, the appearance of this numinous, contrasexual figure may represent the need of the psyche, in order to come to a more complete entelechal realization, to rebalance toward the emotional, spiritual, and subjective. Some classic examples of anima symbols from literature include Dante's figure of Beatrice, and Ayesha, "she who must be obeyed" from the novel by H. Rider Haggard called "She" (Jung 1969, 54--72).

With this turn toward the romantic, as we find beginning in Ovid, the heart is a place of suffering. The heart is wounded, broken, lost. For example, in the poem *Arbor Amoris* written in 1460 by French poet, vagabond, and thief, Francois Villon (1431--1463?),

I have a tree, a graft of Love,

That in my heart has taken root;

Sad are the buds and blooms thereof,

And bitter sorrow is its fruit; (Ballads, n.d.)

The erotic object, the loved one, is a spiritualized ideal that “resides” inwardly in the heart and gets projected onto the other. The difficulty of achieving intimacy with the idealized woman is a central theme of the poems of the troubadours. If the heart represents our ideal realization, and our distance from this is named having a lost heart, then the suffering of distance from the woman is symbolic of our difficulty in realizing our essence, or finding the heart. The inward possession of idealized love and the outward manifestation of intimacy with the other are mirror images of the realization of the heart, of being what we are meant to be, which is to embody an ultimate love.

This notion of the love of the heart brings the sacred and secular together. The interchange between spiritual and erotic love has a long history that continues to this day. For us, the strains of sweet soul music emerged from the cadences of gospel. The love of God or a person is interchangeable in popular music. Tantric practices, a school of yoga, unite the sexual and the sacred (Anand 1989, 5--7).

As we now see the heart as the home of our most precious aspects, we can understand the lost heart as the protected heart. We do not so much lose the heart as put our heart into hiding in order to protect these most elevated aspects of the self: the original, loving, giving, innocent, and foolish aspects of the self, which risk destruction and loss in a lost-hearted world.

### The Heart In the Renaissance

Beginning with the 1400's the practice of finding the heart spread from the monk, troubadour, and saint to the common person. The folk were encouraged to look to their own hearts for their source of spirituality (Jager 2000, 104). All of this suggested a movement toward the humanistic, that is, a looking within oneself, rather than to an outside authority, for the source

of knowing. This suggests a motion toward an immanence theory, an awareness of a divine presence within all materiality (Immanence, n.d.).

As we entered the Renaissance, the humanistic project took hold in Europe. The meaning of heart advanced toward the Mencian concept. Men like the Italian philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463--1494) who in his work, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, known as the manifesto of the Renaissance, shows the common heart of all wisdom schools (Oration, n.d.), the definitive polymath Leonardo da Vinci, and Giordano Bruno (1548--1600) who asserted that the sun was one of countless stars, were among the transcendental humanists who “were inspired by the idea of a participation in the creative process of the universe. In these men enthusiasm and rationality were united (Tillich 2000, 105).” The goal of these men became the realization of our infinite potentials. Finding commonality with the Confucians, people were seen as,

. . . the microcosm, in whom all cosmic forces are potentially present, and who participates in all spheres and strata of the universe. Through him the universe continues the creative process which first has produced him as the aim and the center of the creation. Now man has to shape his world and himself, according to the productive powers given to him. In him nature comes to its fulfillment. . . (Tillich 2000, 104)

The doctrine of the individual as the microcosmic participant in the creative process of the macrocosm presented these philosophers with the possibility of this synthesis (Tillich 2000, 105). This place where the individual and universal merged is represented by the heart.

The philosopher Spinoza, who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, furthered our understanding of heart without naming it as such. He saw that the essence of a thing was its *conatus*, or striving toward being that which it is (Tillich 2000, 20). To put it another way, the striving is the thing itself, for when it goes, so does the thing.

This thing that strives to be what it is, the heart, is the home of entelechy. It is where the blueprint is written and it is the motor for pushing toward realization of one's essence.

For Mencius, our commonality was found in the “taste” of the heart for goodness. This common receptivity to the quality of goodness leads to a universal capacity for compassion, which, when cultivated to its ultimate manifestation, gives one a natural inclination to the right. In the Enlightenment, it was believed that commonality would be found in rationality. Scientific education would bring us to our common source that would lead to the greatest good (Tillich 2000, 114). Such ideas marked the beginning of the end of the symbolic power of the heart and its method of self-actualization. The passion for self-creation as the manifestation of the universal will waned (Tillich 2000, 106).

#### Empiricism vs. the Avatars of the Heart

This European world of the 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the ascendancy of empiricism. With the advent of such highly influential British empirical philosophers John Locke (1632--1704) and David Hume (1711--1776) the home of thinking and the center of our being was moved to the head, brain, mind (Jager 2000, 151). The philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1588--1679), struck a blow against the humanist view that the individual was the center of morality and goodness. His vision not only moved away from heart-centeredness, but toward a grim view of humanity. In his masterwork “Leviathan,” he promoted the belief that human beings were inherently selfish and destructive and could only be made cooperative through the firm hand of obedience to a strong central authoritarian government (Leviathan, n.d.).

However, in our dialectical world, the heart view continued to be asserted by an enlightened few. A central critic of the Enlightenment glorification of intellect and reason was

the Genevois philosopher, writer, and composer, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712--1778). In precise harmony with Mencius's notion of the human taste for goodness, Rousseau also pointed to the endless examples of a natural sympathy that humans feel for the suffering of others as a proof of their natural, intrinsic moral nature (Rousseau, Dunn and May 2002, 107--108). He believed that the true philosophy of happiness was not to be found through a process of thinking, but came through listening with our heart, where our virtues were naturally engraved (Rousseau, Dunn and May 2002, 67).

Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671--1713), was an English politician, philosopher, and writer who had a powerful influence on the 18th Century. Like the Confucians, in his masterpiece called *The Characteristics*, he asserted that man's goal and capability was to find harmony within himself and with the universe. He did not believe, like Hobbes, that we were merely a collection of selfish, egoistical, destructive appetites, but rather our desires were a good part of ourselves and could be in harmony with the whole (Gosse 1905, 188--189). He also, like Mencius, believed in what his successors, Hutcheson and Hume, were to call the moral sense. Agreeing with Mencius's definition of heart, he saw that 'the taste for goodness,' the ability to distinguish right from wrong, is an intrinsic aspect of human nature (Anthony Ashley Cooper, n.d.).

This moral sense was directly related to the heart by another explorer of the human condition from that time, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702--1782) who was a German theosopher. Theosophy is a religious and mystical doctrine that states that all religions and philosophies aim toward the perfection of the human toward the divine (Theosophy, n.d.). He promulgated the idea of the *sensus communis*, the sense of the good within us all, translated simply as "heart" (Gadamer 2003, 24).

Oetinger, in using an example parallel to Mencius's of the natural feelings of empathy, said, "Fathers are moved without proof to care for their children; love does not demonstrate, but often against reason rends the heart at the beloved's approach" (Gadamer 2003, 25).

This common sense, which is the proof in rhetoric, is the verdict of the Heavenly Mandate for the Chinese. In this view, the will of the people determined if leaders were living from their hearts. What is built through the great universal cultural project known as *bildung*, is our great democratic idea that together, through the great web of hearts united, we can find our way to fulfillment.

The common ring of what every heart shares is brought in full circle to the realization that not only do we all share a common heart, but that everything is held within the heart. As Oetinger went on to say, "The whole of life has its center in the heart, which by means of common sense grasps countless things all at the same time (Gadamer 2003, 26)."

Oetinger's vision of synthesis, unity, and harmony was one that was intrinsic to Chinese thought and its heart-centered approach (Koller 1970, 200). However, it ran against the movement of analysis and separation that were the mode and ethos of the scientific method emerging at that time in Europe.

### The Torch of Lament for the Lost Heart

With the understanding of the circulation of the blood, discovered by William Harvey in 1628, the heart took another step toward losing its symbolic power. With the advent of science and technology our metaphors changed. The heart became literalized as the cardiac muscle. It was seen as a spring or pump (Jager 2000, 151, 166).



Though we have come to a greater understanding of the material world, we have lost the heart, and so have lost what is central to who we are in the universe. The heart, once the noblest symbol of all that is best within us, was, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, reduced to a cliché of romantic novels.

Through the world view of philosophers like Descartes and Kant, the elimination of the “middle” of the human being, which Plato called the *thymoides*, and what Mencius called heart, left man without a central core of being out of which his ethical self emerged. The dominance of intellect over heart eliminated the symbolic recognition of our possibility of unity which left us with meaninglessness. What was lost was the Chinese concept of *ren* or the Greek notion of *arête*. These terms allowed us to imagine profound being, humankind’s optimal realization (Tillich 2000, 3, 82--83).

The torch of lament of the loss of heart that emerged from the dehumanization process of the advance of modernity was taken up by the romantics. The revered German author, Goethe, who lived from 1749--1832 foretold this longing for the heart in his most profound work, considered to be one of the peaks of western civilization, *Faust* (Goethe, n.d.). The main character speaks, referring to the unity of self-knowledge, reason, the energetic source of creation, essence, and the heart:

When in our narrow cell the lamp  
Once more sends out its friendly beams,  
It grows brighter, here within the breast,  
Within the heart that knows itself.  
Reason once more begins to speak  
And Hope once more begins to bloom.

We long, now, for the waters of life,

Ah, for the wellspring of our lives! (Goethe 2000, 63)

And,

Who, far beyond things' mere appearance,

Strives only for their deepest essence. (Goethe 2000, 69)

Despite the heroic efforts of these figures who criticized our lost-hearted world, today we live in a disenchanted world dominated by literalism, technology, and what post-modernist Jean F. Lyotard (1984, 39) called performativity. In the social democracies, we have seen the last 30 years marked by a Hobbesian Social Darwinism, marking a precipitous decline for the avatars of heart. Co-opted by the likes of the Hallmark Greeting Card Company, the image of the heart is ubiquitous, but we hardly notice it and its meaning has been denuded of depth and substance.

Nevertheless, seekers continue to intuit that something is missing, and continue to search. The great poets, who travel within, know how to listen, find their hearts, and tell us what we are, speak to the longing we all feel as a result of the distance from our deepest essence. The poet William Butler Yeats (1865--1939) brings us back to this theme of listening, longing, and the heart as the place of essence in his poem, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* (1888):

I will arise and go now, for always night and day

I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;

While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,

I hear it in the deep heart's core. (Bartleby, n.d.)

As the Romantic Movement attempted to be a corrective for a world dominated by logos, the battle continues today to rediscover an essential part of our existence. The contemporary work of religious philosopher Karen Armstrong (2009), in her reverence for mystery, and

participation in a devotion to the development of compassion, shows that the spirit of the heart lives today.

My young daughter, like every child who learns to draw and learns the symbol, is captivated by the image of the heart, because in her heart she senses what it means. For her, and every child like her, this paper's aim is to take one small step in bringing us back to our great heritage of depth, center, essence, and ideal, that is, it aims to find the lost heart.

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