

The Brain in Your Chest:  
Science-Backed Techniques For Tapping Into Your Heart Intelligence

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### The "Little Brain" in the Heart

In 1991, a scientific discovery published in the journal *Neurocardiology* put to rest any lingering doubt that the human heart is more than a pump. The name of the journal gives us a clue to the discovery of a powerful relationship between the heart and the brain that went unrecognized in the past.

A team of scientists led by J. Andrew Armour, M.D., Ph.D., of the University of Montreal, which was studying this intimate relationship between the two, found that about 40,000 specialized neurons, or sensory neurites, form a communication network within the heart.

For clarity, let me say that the term neuron describes a specialized cell that can be excited (electrically stimulated) in a way that allows it to share information with other cells in the body. While large numbers of neurons are obviously concentrated in the brain and along the spinal cord, the discovery of these cells in the heart and other organs, in smaller numbers, gives new insight into the profound level of heart intelligence and communication that exists within the body.

Neurites are tiny projections that come from the main body of a neuron to perform different functions in the body. Some carry information away from the neuron to connect with other cells, while others detect signals from various sources and carry them toward the neuron. What makes this discovery exceptional is that the neurites in the heart perform many of the same functions that are found in the brain.

In simple terms, Armour and his team discovered what has come to be known as the little brain in the heart, and the specialized neurites that make the existence of this little brain possible. As the scientists who made the discovery say in their report, "The 'heart brain' is an intricate network of nerves, neurotransmitters, proteins, and support cells similar to those found in the brain proper."

The discovery of 40,000 sensory neurites in the human heart opens the door to vast new possibilities that parallel those that have been accurately described in the scriptures of some of our most ancient and cherished spiritual traditions.

A key role of heart intelligence is to detect changes of hormones and other chemicals within the body and communicate those changes to the brain so it can meet our needs accordingly.

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The heart's brain does this by converting the language of the body—emotions—into the electrical language of the nervous system so that its messages make sense to the brain. The heart's coded messages inform the brain when we need more adrenaline, for example, in a stressful situation, or when it's safe to create less adrenaline and focus on building a stronger immune system.

Now that the little brain in the heart has been recognized by researchers, the role it plays in a number of physical and metaphysical functions has also come to light. These functions include:

- + Direct heart communication with sensory neurites in other organs in the body
- + The heart-based wisdom known as heart intelligence
- + Intentional states of deep intuition
- + Intentional precognitive abilities
- + The mechanism of intentional self-healing
- + The awakening of super-learning abilities
- + And much more

The heart's little brain has been found to function in two distinct yet related ways. It can act:

- + Independently of the cranial brain to think, learn, remember, and even sense our inner and outer worlds on its own
- + In harmony with the cranial brain to give us the benefit of a single, potent neural network shared by the two separate organs

Armour's discovery of heart intelligence has the potential to forever change the way we think of ourselves. It gives new meaning to what's possible in our bodies and what we're capable of achieving in our lives. In his words: "It has become clear in recent years that a sophisticated two-way communication occurs between the heart and the brain, with each influencing the other's function."

The science from the new field of neurocardiology is just beginning to catch up with traditional beliefs when it comes to explaining experiences such as intuition, precognition, and self-healing. This is especially apparent when we examine the principles offered in some of our most ancient and cherished spiritual traditions. Almost universally, historical teachings demonstrate an understanding of the heart's intelligence at the level of having direct influence upon our personalities, our daily decisions, and our ability to make moral choices that include the discernment of right and wrong.

### Your Heart's Wisdom Is True Only for You

Your heart's intelligence is with you always. It's constant. You can trust it. It's important to acknowledge this because it means that the wisdom of your heart—the answers to the deepest and most mysterious questions of life that no one else can answer—already exist within you. Rather than being something that needs to be built or created before it can be used, the link between your heart and the place that holds your answers is already established. And while it's been with you since the time you were born, it's your choice as to when you access that link as a "hotline" to the deepest truths of your life.

1. What is my intention in sharing what I've discovered?

2. Who will benefit if I share this information? Or more specifically: How will \_\_\_\_\_ benefit if I share this information? (Fill in the blank with the name of the person with whom you're considering sharing your revelation.)

3. Who may be hurt by my choice to share this information?

The key to using these questions is to be absolutely clear with yourself about the very first question. To be conscious of your intention is the foundation of your personal responsibility.

With your intention firmly in place, it becomes easy to evaluate your answers to the next two questions to see if they honor your stated intention. Whether they do or don't, through this simple process you will find the answer to your question about the appropriateness of sharing your deep knowing.

With these ideas in mind, let's discuss how to apply the steps of coherence to access the wisdom and guidance of the heart.

#### Asking Your Heart a Question

Now that I've described the role of heart intelligence in accessing deep intuition, I'd like to take this opportunity to share a proven technique that allows you to access its wisdom, as well. And I want this exercise to be personal, so I will offer this section as if I'm speaking to you directly while you are sitting with me in my living room. This exercise is one of those places where science and spirituality overlap beautifully. While science can describe the close relationship between the heart and the brain, the ancient spiritual practices and self-mastery techniques that have helped people rely on this relationship for thousands of years do so without needing a scientific explanation.

It's probably no coincidence that the rigorous scientific techniques developed by the researchers at the Institute of HeartMath closely parallel some of the techniques preserved in the monasteries of ancient traditions or by indigenous spiritual practitioners. We all learn in different ways, and my sense is that when something is true, it appears in the world in different forms to reflect the variations in our learning.

With this idea in mind, I've chosen to share the following IHM technique, with permission, because it's safe, it's based upon well-researched science that validates the steps, and it has been simplified in a way that makes it accessible and easy to use in our everyday lives.

As with any technique that's passed from teacher to student, however, the steps for creating heart-brain coherence are best experienced with a seasoned practitioner to facilitate the process. So while I'll describe these principles for creating heart-brain coherence in the following paragraphs, I also encourage you to experience them for yourself using the no-cost online instructions found on the Institute of HeartMath website.

The technique to create heart-brain coherence is appropriately called the Quick Coherence® Technique and has been refined by the Institute of HeartMath into the first three simple steps described below. Independently, each step sends a signal to the body that a specific shift has been put into motion. Combined, the steps create an experience that takes us back to a natural harmony that existed in our bodies earlier in life, before we began to disconnect our heart-brain network through our conditioning. Steps 4 and 5, where we access our heart intelligence, build upon the coherence created in Steps 1 through 3.

## Five Steps to Ask Your Heart a Question

The steps to create quick coherence for accessing your heart's intelligence are as follows.

### **Step 1: Create Heart Focus**

**Action:** Allow your awareness to move from your mind to the area of your heart.

**Result:** This sends a signal to your heart that a shift has taken place: You are no longer engaged in the world around you and are now becoming aware of the world within you.

### **Step 2: Slow Your Breathing**

**Action:** Begin to breathe a little more slowly than usual. Take approximately five to six seconds to inhale, and use the same pace as you exhale.

**Result:** This simple step sends a second signal to your body that you are safe and in a place that supports your process. Deep, slow breathing has long been known to stimulate the relaxation response of the nervous system (aka the parasympathetic response).

### **Step 3: Feel a Rejuvenating Feeling**

**Action:** To the best of your ability, feel a genuine sense of care, appreciation, gratitude, or compassion for anything or anyone. The key to success here is that your feeling be as sincere and heartfelt as possible.

**Result:** The quality of this feeling fine-tunes and optimizes the coherence between your heart and your brain. While everyone is capable of evoking a feeling for this step, it's one of those processes that you may need to experiment with to find what works best for you.

With the successful completion of Step 3, the connection linking the heart and brain—and resulting in heart-brain coherence—has been established. At this point, the heart and brain are in communication through the neural network that connects them. While this is technically the completion of the Quick Coherence® Technique itself, it's also a beginning step in other processes. We may use the coherence we've created to access deeper states of awareness, including the deep intuition described in this chapter. It's from a state of heart-brain coherence that we may access our deep intuition and receive the guidance of our heart's intelligence. Steps 4 and 5 below detail a procedure to do just that.

### **Step 4: Ask Your Heart a Question**

**Action:** The previous three steps create the harmony between your brain and your heart that enables you to tap into your heart's wisdom. As you continue to breathe and hold the focus in your heart, it is time to ask your question. Heart intelligence generally works best when the questions are brief and to the point. Remember, your heart doesn't need a preface or the history of a situation before the question. Ask your question silently, as a single concise sentence, and then allow your heart to respond in a way that works for you.

**Result:** Your intuition opens up and you begin a dialogue.

I'm often asked to interpret the symbols that show up in people's dreams or the meaning of an experience that they've had in their lives. While it's possible for me to offer an opinion, it's just that. It's

my sense of what the image or experience may mean in their life. The truth is that I can't possibly know what another person's dream or experience means for them. It's also true that they can!

The key to being successful at dialoguing with your heart is this: *If you are empowered enough to have the experience, then you are empowered to know for yourself what your experience means.*

While I don't want to influence your questioning process, an example is sometimes helpful. A mysterious dream is the perfect opportunity to apply heart intelligence to a real-world situation. From the heart-brain coherence established in the previous three steps, simply ask the following kind of questions, filling in the blank with the names of the people, symbols, or identities of what you're asking about. These are example formats only. You can choose one that fits for you or create your own using one of the following as a template.

*"From the place of my heart's deepest knowing, I ask to be shown the significance of \_\_\_\_\_ in my dreams."*

*"From the single eye of my heart that knows only my truth, I ask for the meaning of the \_\_\_\_\_ in my life."*

*"Please help me to understand the significance of \_\_\_\_\_ in my life."*

#### **Step 5: Listen for an Answer**

**Action:** Become aware of how your body feels immediately as you are asking your question in Step 4. Make a note of any sensations—such as warmth, tingling, or ringing of the ears—and emotions that may arise. For people who are already attuned to their bodies and their hearts' intelligence, this step is the easiest part of the process. For those who may have had less experience in listening to their bodies, this is an exercise in awareness.

**Result:** Everyone learns and experiences uniquely. There is no correct or incorrect way of receiving your heart's intelligence. The key here is to know what works best for you.

As I mentioned before, I tend to receive my heart's wisdom as words, while at the same time feeling sensations of warmth in my body. Other people never hear words but experience nonverbal forms of communication only, such as warmth radiating from their hearts or in their guts. Sometimes people feel a wave of peace wash over them as they receive the answer to their question. Remember, you and your body are unique partners in the world. What's important here is to listen to your own body to learn how it communicates with you and give it the opportunity to be heard.

Now you have a step-by-step technique to help you feel empowered in the face of life's greatest challenges. While you probably can't change the situations that arrive at your doorstep, you can definitely change the way you feel in and respond to those situations. If you've not already done so, you may discover that the wisdom and intelligence of your heart becomes a great friend to you, one of the greatest sources of strength in your life. The consistency and accuracy of heart-based solutions empowers you to face any situation with any person or force with a confidence that's hard to find if you feel helpless, overwhelmed, powerless, and lost.

I can honestly say that my heart's wisdom has never led me to make a bad choice. And while I haven't used this technique for every big decision I've made in my life, I can also say with honesty that the only choices I've regretted are the ones I made when I did not honor my heart intelligence.

As you complete this exercise, I invite you to bear an important point in mind: There is no correct or incorrect way of receiving your heart's wisdom. Each of us is born with our own unique code that allows us to access our heart's wisdom and apply it in our lives. The secret to the code is to know what works best for you.

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