

# “The Heart has its Reasons”

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An address given at Defenders Lodge on March 2, 2011  
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As I hope you may have gathered, the subjects I have discussed in these talks aren't at first sight typically Masonic subjects. I have tried to avoid any interpretations of our ritual, since of course they would only be my interpretations. And it is important, vitally important, that each man thinks for himself the meaning of our symbolism.

In most of these talks I say, “what has this to do with Masonry”. Tonight I won't say this. My subject tonight is only peripherally connected to masonry. I'll leave it to you to think about it. This being the nearest official visit to St. Valentine's Day it seemed reasonable to talk about the heart. (I should add that it is also the nearest meeting to R.W.Bro. Kalinowsky's birthday)

Recently I had some heart trouble. In fact I was sitting in the waiting room at the Heart institute on Valentine's Day thinking about the subject of this talk. There was no obvious reference to St. Valentine in the Heart Institute only lots of advice on what to eat, how much to exercise etc.; nothing on heart break, heart ache or what Elvis was thinking about when he sang “Heart break Hotel”.

Obviously I've been thinking of this a lot! Even before Valentine's day. Then I heard a program called “Discovery” on the BBC World Service, which I have adopted (copied!) as the title of this talk

How do we regard this most vital organ which beats inside us at 50-70 beats a minute for an average of 82 years? A lot of beats. (3.5 billion!) When it stops, we stop!

I learned in grammar school and in medical school that the heart was a pump. A bag of muscle with a mechanism to make it beat regularly, faster or slower. And that the brain was the control centre of the nervous system controlling the whole of the rest of the body through a vast set of connections through the spinal cord and the peripheral nervous system. All very straightforward.

But. We say:

- **“The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.” (Blaise Pascal)**
- **and, “We know truth, not only by reason, but also by the heart.”(Blaise Pascal)**
- **“I left my Heart in San Francisco”**
- **“With glowing hearts we see thee rise, the True north Strong and free” Calixee Lavalee**
- **“For the Heart may conceive and the head devise in vain if the hand be not prompt to execute the design”**
  
- **Well since my baby left me  
I've found a new place to dwell  
Its down at the end of Lonely Street  
That's Heartbreak Hotel**

In other words we use the “heart”, a bag of muscle, as a metaphor.

Rene Descartes introduced us to Dualism: the concept of a dichotomy between body & mind and the body being a series of machines. This was reflected in medical school curriculum beginning formally in 1912 with Aaron Flexner, who proposed that future physicians be taught in teaching hospitals by specialists each of whom would know a whole lot about a particular system but little about all the others.

By the 60s and 70s, however, a new paradigm began to emerge: that of human beings as whole persons and the need to recognize them as such. That systems were far more integrated, particularly the body and the mind.

Many patients after a heart transplant have a (sometimes profound) personality change. Examples are plentiful. There was a case of a man who had been known for being down to earth, plain spoken and straightforward who, after his heart transplant composed poetry every day for his wife of 40 years. Another had a strong sense that February 17<sup>th</sup> was an important day for him but couldn't think why. Turned out it was the birthday of the donor of his heart.

There is a dense neural network in the heart, similar to the brain. It is capable of storing and recalling data and has 300-400,000 connections. It has a collection of nervous tissue only exceeded by the brain and the spinal cord. Think of the transplant patient receiving this -- it is akin to a CD with its data erased but still capable of being read. Not everyone accepts this however; that the heart has a neural and sentient function. From a scientific viewpoint we know that after a trauma or a particularly exciting event (such as major surgery) our senses are more alert. Does this explain the phenomenon of change in the post transplant patient?

In the Iovadic Indian medical tradition they use different models and paradigms. They divide up the body and its functions into "chakras", of which there are six. The heart chakra is called the Anahata

In their tradition, the heart is stronger than the head – intuition superior to intellect. In deep meditation people describe a tingling sensation beginning in the lower part of the spine and traveling upwards into the centre of the chest (the heart chakra) and then the link between body and mind broken. The sensation is described as "coming face to face with brilliant light" (NB similar phenomena are reported by people who recover from a cardiac arrest). They come to believe that "you are light", "you are the spirit"

Western Medicine has no way of assessing this subjectivity. We know that there are many electrical terminals in the heart. That the energy given off by the heart can be detected from a metre away and that electromagnetic activity can be discerned 10-15 metres from the body. That's all we know "scientifically". Despite this scientific ignorance we all have a meaning in mind if we hear the expression "kindle in your heart the flame of love".

"Cardiac coherence" means the heart and lungs are functioning rhythmically. When they cease to do so we tend to lose brain function. Restoring slow regular breathing, achievable through Mantra recitation, saying rosary prayers or practicing ritual our brain function responds favorably, memory improves, and we experience a feeling of peace and wellbeing.

We have long known this at some level. Consider pictures of the bleeding heart of Jesus, well known to all Roman Catholics: the over 3 million paintings of this depict love emanating from a heart wounded by a spear and emitting flames.

When we are happy or sad, we feel it in our chest! Do we have a physical centre in the heart, which creates this? It is surely much more than simply a poetic flight of fancy.

It seems to me that the lessons and teachings of masonry are partly sensed by the brain and the heart. At first glance and when we witness our ceremonies for the first time, they may make little sense intellectually. However something, at some level, makes them appealing. Later, sometimes much later, and after many repetitions, the meanings become clearer and clearer. Is this an example of perception first by the heart and then by the brain?

We may never know, but some day, perhaps very soon, we will know the answer to these questions. Perhaps though, when we know all the answers, then life will not be so interesting and our hearts will yearn for our now past romantic view of the heart.