Get to the Heart of the Matter
By Andrea Lyle, RN

In the fourth century B. C., the Greek philosopher Aristotle identified the heart as the most important organ of the body.  He described it as the seat of intelligence, motion, sensation and the center of vitality. Later, in the twelfth century, Master Nicolaus of Salerno observed the heart to be the primary "spiritual member" of the body.  As such, it was viewed as the seat of all emotions.

Most of us have experienced the excitement and joy that emanates from our heart at the birth of a baby or the stabbing pain of grief when a loved one dies. Even the words and phrases we often use like “Take heart,” “Put your heart into it,” and “Listen to your heart” acknowledge the significance of the heart in everyday life.

Why is it the heart captures our attention in so many aspects of our lives?

Is it merely an organ that pumps blood throughout the body?

Research over the past 20 years shows there is much more to the heart than the “just an organ” theory allows. In his book *Science of the Heart*, Rollin McCraty PhD writes, “Neurocardiologists discovered the heart has a complex neural network that is sufficiently extensive to be characterized as a brain on the heart. The *heart-brain*, as it is commonly called, is an intricate network of complex ganglia, neurotransmitters, proteins and support cells, the same as those of the brain in the head. The heart-brain’s neural circuitry enables it to act independently of the cranial brain to learn, remember, make decisions and even feel and sense.” This sounds very similar to what our ancestors believed about the heart being the seat of intelligence and of all emotions.

Not only does the heart have a brain of its own, but that heart-brain actually sends more information to the brain than the brain does to the heart. What’s more, the electricity generated by the heart of one person can be detected and measured in the brain patterns of another person nearby. In practical terms, that means whatever you are feeling in your heart also impacts the people around you. These findings are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what is being discovered about the heart and its importance in maintaining a happy, healthy life.

The Heart Math Institute in California has been studying the heart for decades. Their discoveries about the heart’s significant role in health and wellbeing led them to begin teaching and providing tools for what they call “Heart Centered Living” – which they define as living in alignment with your heart, brain and emotions so life flows easily and effortlessly.

In one study conducted by the Heart Math Institute, researchers found several instances in which people had heart attacks, but no sign of heart disease. The findings hint at the fact that heart disease, heart attacks and heart-related deaths have more to do with your heart’s dis-ease -- the misalignment between the heart, emotions and the brain -- than your cholesterol levels, weight or blood pressure. According to Dr. McCraty, the major cause of this misalignment is stress.

McCraty says “stress is emotional unease, the experience of which ranges from low-grade feelings of emotional unrest to intense inner turmoil. Stressful emotions clearly can arise in response to external challenges or events, and also from ongoing internal dialogs and attitudes. Recurring feelings of worry, anxiety, anger, judgment, resentment, impatience, overwhelm and self-doubt often consumes a large part of our energy and dulls our day-to-day life experiences.” Ultimately, that negative energy has detrimental effects on our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

As part of the Heart Centered Living approach, HeartMath has developed a simple self-regulating process called The Coherence Technique, designed to bring you back into alignment by releasing stress and eliminating draining emotions such as frustration, irritation, anxiety and anger. When you are in a coherent state, your thoughts and emotions are balanced and you experience ease and inner harmony. I have found this to be a very effective tool when I feel out of my flow, and it is a great way to get my heart jumping for joy again.

Quick Coherence Technique for Adults:

 Step 1: Focus your attention in the area of the heart. Imagine your breath is flowing in and out of your heart or chest area, breathing a little slower and deeper than usual. *Suggestion: Inhale 5 seconds, exhale 5 seconds (or whatever rhythm is comfortable) for about 60 seconds or so.*

Step 2: Make a sincere attempt to experience a regenerative feeling such as appreciation or care for someone or something in your life. *Suggestion: Try to re-experience the feeling you have for someone you love, a pet, a special place, an accomplishment, etc. or focus on a feeling of calm or ease.*

It really is that simple and you can repeat this process throughout the day whenever necessary. Not only is it good for you but, as we have discovered, it is good for those around you too. So when you feel stressed out, overwhelmed, anxious, or out of sync, get to the heart of the matter by giving this coherence technique a try. It will help you expand your heart connections for your personal growth, your health and overall wellbeing.

*Andrea Lyle has worked as a registered nurse for 30 years. She is now a holistic wellness consultant and SoulFit Coach. If you want a greater sense of overall wellbeing, call her at 970-903-6047 or email her at* *soaringspiritstudio@gmail.com* *to schedule a free, no obligation discovery session.*