

The Coherence of the Heart

by Dinah Lawson

Did you know that the heart produces hormones? That it has an electro-magnetic field many times greater and more powerful than that of the brain? That there is more information flowing from the heart to the brain than the other way around? That by focussing to the heart and following a simple exercise, we can help ourselves to better cope with stress?

Those of you who attended the open day at the 2003 INEH Teacher conference held at Lodge Hill, Pulborough, will have heard Wendy Glaubitz speak. She alerted us to the research being undertaken by the HeartMath Institute in California, and in particular to a book by Joseph Chilton Pearce called, *The Biology of Transcendence*. He talks about the intelligence of the heart and the idea that it is the fifth aspect of the brain. I was fascinated by what Wendy told us, purchased and read that book, explored further, shared and discussed the information with various friends and colleagues. I used the information with beneficial results for my clients, my students, and myself and I recently took a short course given by the HeartMath Institute in England.

'HeartMath' (the mathematics of the heart) was founded in 1991 based on research done by Doc Childre on the heart-brain connections – physically, psychologically and metaphorically. He talks about the intelligence of the heart too. In particular they have focussed on the heart rate variability and the fact that this is something that the individual can learn to control and which will, in turn, have a positive effect on his autonomic nervous system, certain aspects of his hormone output, his immune system, and his ability to cope with stress.

So what is heart rate variability? It is the variation in the interval between each heartbeat. If, for example, you have a pulse of sixty beats per minute, the interval between each beat will not be exactly the same (i.e. one beat per second) but maybe the intervals will be: 1 second, 0.59 second, 0.57 second, 1.01 second, and so on. This variability is important, in fact essential, and is connected to the balance between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic aspects of the autonomic nervous system. This variability can be rather haphazard and create what is known as an 'incoherent pattern', or it can be smooth and create a 'coherent pattern' (a sine wave) or 'heart coherence'. When the heart rate variability is in coherence then the heart produces more of the hormones beneficial to health, enables a boost to the immune system, calms the autonomic nervous system, and enables the brain to cope better with the various stressors to which all of us are prone.

The HeartMath institute have developed simple exercises to enable heart coherence which they have then taught to thousands of men and women in business and industry in USA with some astonishing results. A short daily exercise has produced less sickness, less absenteeism, a lower turnover of staff, and increased productivity in the companies where the HeartMath was taught and practiced. What is the exercise? The individual is asked to sit and focus to his/her heart. Then to breathe slowly, gently and evenly and as if they could breathe through the heart. Finally, to bring in a positive emotion and to focus to the feeling of that, whilst continuing to breathe through the heart. Then to continue to do this for a few minutes. The exercise should be repeated daily and whenever the individual feels stressed. This is the basic exercise.

HeartMath have developed technology to measure when heart coherence is achieved – a hand held device or a computer programme - which are an aid to achieving the coherence, but not essential. There are also variations on the basic exercise and several very helpful books to enable the transformation of stress, anxiety, depression and anger.

The positive emotion is achieved by focussing to a person you love (though not where conflicting emotions might be aroused), or a place that you love, or an event or an activity that gladdens your heart – and holding the feeling thus aroused (not the thought). One of my clients recalls the feeling of skiing downhill, another the feeling from the memory of a photograph of playing on the beach with her son when he was small – and so on.

So – you may be saying – surely meditation will bring the same benefits and more? Why bother with the HeartMath techniques? It well may be that you, as a regular meditator, do not need them – but your clients may. Many people have problems starting to meditate – so they do not even try or give up easily. The heart coherence exercises are easy to learn and to do and the benefits can be felt quickly. They are also a very useful preparation for meditation and I have found them useful for myself. I have slightly raised blood pressure and I noticed that whereas meditation could bring my blood pressure reading down a little, the Heart Coherence exercise brought it down by several more points.

Some people will not even begin to meditate – but they might try an exercise that helps them to cope with stress.

The importance of all this to me is that, although the

HeartMath Institute may be a commercial enterprise, it is helping thousands of people to cope better with stress but, above all, to focus to their hearts and thus their heart centres. This will encourage the opening of the heart centre. We are told that humanity as a whole is approaching the first initiation and I believe that heart coherence work will facilitate this – and more. Hugh

L'Anson Faussett in his book *The Fruits of Silence*, stated: "When the mind consents to be the intelligence within the heart, it is no longer the enemy of the real". That can only be a good thing!

For more information try the website:
www.heartmath.org