

Living a Heart Centred Life

by Nicholas de Castella

By connecting with our heart we can learn to transform anxiety and frustration into excitement and ease, and experience the wealth of peace, freedom, happiness and love that is our true nature.

Current research is indicating that centring ourselves in our heart raises functioning at all levels.

It enhances our **health**, improving immune system functioning by bringing the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems into balance.

It has been shown that spending quality time connecting with our heart lowers the stress hormone 'Cortisol' and raises the anti-aging hormone DHEA and this is restorative to the whole body.

Performance at work, school and in sport has also to been shown to be enhanced by centring ourselves in our hearts.

There is little doubt that performance can be significantly improved by learning to develop a positive emotional attitude. Performance, is enhanced as our feelings become more positive. For example learning to shift from frustration to ease. It may take a while to develop the new attitude, but, it's well worth the effort.

We also **relate** at our peak when we connect and share from our hearts. Learning to keep our hearts open, even when expressing anger, enables issues to be cleared and relationships to deepen.

Our heart is also a great source of **inner guidance** and also a place of spiritual connection, as in the 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' No doubt you are familiar with the term: 'listen to your heart'. When we centre ourselves in our hearts, we can receive messages about issues in our lives. However, our guidance only comes for our next step. The mind is usually thinking ahead, making up five year plans and strategising, but when we live from our hearts we receive information about what we need to do today.

So what does a heart centre life look like?

The characteristics of a heart centred life are: presence, openness, connection, intuition, courage, gentleness, ease, love, peace, honesty, respect, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, playfulness, gratitude, mystery and trust.

When we live from our hearts, we **live in the present**. Because the heart is constantly responding to what is here now, we meet each experience as fresh and new. When we live in the present moment we experience less stress and our lives become richer and more alive.

Living a heart centred life is about **being open**. It is about being open to learning. Its about saying 'Yes' to life and being willing to experience fully what is happening for us. We welcome all experiences in, even the uncomfortable ones. As we do this we heal the past and connect with more deeply with ourselves.

Opening to our experience like this **takes courage**. The word 'courage' comes from the french word 'cour' which means 'heart'. Living from our heart requires the courage to be willing to face what we feel like running away from. Our heart is a great inner guide for us but it does not always steer us in an easy direction. Indeed, sometimes our heart tells us to do the very thing we are most afraid of.

This openness is also about being willing to honestly share what is happening for us and in turn receive what others share with us. This leads to enhanced relationships, living with a level of authenticity that is challenging and highly rewarding.

In our hearts we **feel our connection with all things**. We experience the truth that we are one. By centring in our heart we not only experience a deep sense of inner connection with ourselves, we feel our connection with others and with all things.

Another quality of heart is **gentleness**. With our minds we push ourselves to do what we think we should do. Through our hearts we surrender to our deepest truth. This involves honouring ourselves by being patient with our progress, going deeper into our feelings than guilt, forgiving ourselves for the mistakes we make, letting go of punishment and living with kindness, compassion and mercy.

When we live from our hearts we often spontaneously experience on **a sense of ease** and naturally flow with the rhythms of life. As we become more finely tuned to our feelings we develop trust in the perfection of life.

An essential ingredient for us to be able to live from our hearts is to welcome **Mystery** into our lives. We are never going to be able to understand everything and do not need to. In fact, trying to figure things out is the surest way to stay stuck in our heads. Welcoming mystery means trusting in grace and letting go of our expectations. Embracing mystery is a key that allows us to relax into the present moment

At the centre of our being is **love and peace**. When we live from this place we attract goodness and blessings into our life. We still experience challenges, but welcome them in as opportunities to open our hearts and return home to the truth of who we are. When we set our intentions from our heart, and let them go, we create a powerful force for creating a life with abundant love, friendships and a wealth of blessings.

As we practice living from our heart we come to see coincidences not as accidents but as co-incidences. Co - incidences between the state of our heart and our outer reality. Fear creating frightening events and gratitude creating loving experiences.

My experience of living from my heart is that I feel more and more grateful for smaller and smaller blessings in my life.

Here is a poem by Osho about living a heart centred life:

“The indications that you are on the right path are very simple : your tensions will start disappearing, you will become more and more cool, you will become more and more calm, you will find beauty in things which you have never, ever conceived could be beautiful.

The smallest things will start having tremendous significance. The whole world will become more and more mysterious every day; you will become less and less knowledgeable, more and more innocent - just like a child running after butterflies or collecting sea shells on the beach.

You will feel life not as a problem but as a gift, as a blessing, as a benediction.”

The last thing I want to mention about living a heart centred life is that it becomes more and more enjoyable. The heart loves to have fun and opens in the spirit of fun and playfulness.

There are five stages to this meditation, and I am now going to give you some guidance for each stage.

The first stage involves stopping and being in stillness.

In our modern times it is common to lose touch with ourselves and become stressed by being overly engaged in the outside world. We are often so busy doing things that we become human doings rather than human beings.

We live in a society that is based on the myth that we are going to find happiness in the external world, That by acquiring material wealth or through our achievements we will become happy. This causes us to be constantly on the go, living in a state of restlessness and stress. It also leads us to focus our attention outside ourselves. Happiness is our true nature. It is discovered when we turn our attention inwards and connect with our essence.

This first step then, is about ceasing all activity. Its about letting go of all seeking, all striving. Giving ourselves permission to not go anywhere and not doing anything. It involves spending a few moments practising mindfulness. Mindfulness is about bringing our awareness into the present moment. In this first stage we let ourselves settle down and become aware of the stillness in which all activity happens. There is no need to try to make anything happen. This is an opportunity to take time out and to be here exactly as we are.

In the second stage we focus our attention on our breathing. We spend a few moments practising relaxed flowing connected breathing. Often when we are stressed we constrict our breathing. This has the effect of stopping the energy flowing in our bodies and causes pain. Connected breathing is gentle, deep breathing. We draw the air consciously in and then let go as we exhale. Connected breathing joins together the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realms and assists us to relax and allow energy to flow smoothly through our bodies.

The third stage is about developing presence. It involves turning our attention from our breathing to what we are feeling in our bodies.

In this stage we tune into the actual physical sensations that we are experiencing. We notice the qualities of the sensations and where they are located in our bodies. We use words that describe physical properties: For example warm or cool, tense or relaxed, tight or loose, heavy or light. As we tune into the physical sensations we also become aware of the energy that is moving in our bodies. This energy is emotion. As we tune into the physical sensations we get pointers or signs, as to which emotion is predominately present.

The major emotions are joy and sadness located in our chest, excitement and fear located in our solar plexus, and passion and anger located in our belly. Peace, pain, love and numbness are states of being we also feel. No matter what we feel in this stage we just allow that feeling to happen.

In the fourth stage we accept and allow what ever we feel to be fully experienced. There is no attempt to control or change what we are feeling. We simply welcome the feelings 'in'. As we experience the feelings change happens.

As we feel our feelings the energy flows through our bodies and comes into a state of balance and harmony. We also deepen our relationship with ourselves as we connect to the truth of who we are.

A useful attitude to develop in this stage is the curiosity of a child. Free of judgement, simply witnessing the experience that is unfolding in each moment.

In the fifth stage, we tune in to our hearts. Research indicates that when we focus our attention on our heart, - our head and heart come into balance, and we experience 'coherence'. In a state of coherence we function at our peak. In sport this level of functioning is known as being in the zone.

In this stage we focus our attention on our physical heart, in the centre of our chest, slightly to the left. Coherence is enhanced by cultivating feelings of love and gratitude. To do this we reflect on the things in our life that we are grateful for and call to mind the people who we love. We then allow the feelings of gratitude and love to expand as we consciously breathe into our heart.

Sometimes when we are centred in our heart we receive messages or guidance. This may be in the form of a quiet whisper, a symbol, a picture or insight.