

# Archetypal Heart

## A Little Psychology of the Heart

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### Heart Psychology and Experiential Phenomenology

Recently a CCN reporter who was in the process of reporting on hurricane Katrina got trapped on a roof top with waters rapidly rising. He called out on the air to be rescued, and exclaimed “I want to live! Please send someone for me.” At a moment such as that, whatever problems of living one may be suffering, the sheer goodness of life comes strongly into view.

Often it happens that a brush with death will most powerfully bring the values of the heart into view. The values of the heart have to do with living life as fully as you can, responding to each challenge or opportunity as best you can, and exploring and discovering the fullness of life at each stage of the life cycle, such that in old age, and in facing death, you can look back over your life with thanksgiving for the life that was. If you have not truly lived your life, you will come to face old age or death with bitterness and deep regrets.

Heart psychology is about living life such that delight and deep satisfaction are its hallmarks, and when you come to old age or death, to know your life has been highly satisfying and meaningful, and blessed with many delights...no matter how many wounds or struggles you experienced along the way.

Taking a careful look at what is essential in living a life of delight and satisfaction, heart psychology was formed into a psycho-spiritual model for living that is very simple and handy in getting you in touch with your embodied center of being, and helping you live from there. In helping you find this center it puts you in touch with the vital and deep burning source of existence, the place from which your deepest desires and energies for new living are emerging. Not only is it the creative and free point of your existence in the world, it is the vessel in which you carry all the concerns and contents of your life. Heart theory, as I am formulating it was, in an earlier version, framed in terms of the historical and cross cultural uses of the word ‘heart’ and the related words in various languages. I soon noticed, however, that in addition to the meaning of the ‘vital center’ there were many other conflicting meanings, and numerous rigidly held and unexamined doctrines about it that were often in conflict with each other, and with my own experience of it. I therefore decided to use an *experiential phenomenology* to let the heart tell me about itself. What follows is an overview of heart theory that developed out of this experiential phenomenology. It is a fresh articulation that you should be able to check out for yourself its own veracity by using the model and the suggested practices. I find the most useful way to begin is with the question of *how* we can know we are living from the heart, and to know when we are not. This question, when put to my own embodied heart yielded a most fruitful little theory.

### How do I know when I am living from the heart?

The first thing I noticed is that there is a subtle bodily feeling of delight, new energy, and joy when I make choices that honor the heart’s deepest desires and inclinations. The tissues of the viscera, of even muscles, skin and soft parts become aroused in a rather pleasant way. I also observed an opposite kind of phenomenon: that there can be an uncomfortable feeling when something isn’t right in whatever I am doing or am considering doing. If it is fundamentally wrong for me, it goes against the direction implied by the heart itself. The bodily *feel* of delightful new energy, or of an uncomfortable visceral churning and tightening often felt in the middle of the body, tacitly accompany my intentions and actions. When you attune and find these feelings are clear to you, I call them “feeling tones”. Even more subtle, there can be an unclear *felt-sense* that is either arousing, relaxing, and all of this together can be expressed as a kind of feeling of *organismic rightness*, or a feeling of *organismic wrongness*.

I noticed that this ‘organismic responsiveness’ is a kind of communication closely interlaced with the heart and operates like a compass or indicator; an instrument to help guide our steps in living, choosing, and acting. Putting this together I call it the *Internal Guidance System* (or, ‘IGS,’ for short). The way this works is that the organism gives us detectible bodily felt signals that tell us when we are “on-track” or “off-track” with the heart’s intentions and desires. This seems analogous to the ancient Chinese expression of being ‘in Tao’ or being ‘out of Tao.’ In heart theory, there is indeed something in the heart like the Tao. It ‘issues’ deep inspirations or Invitations for living that resonate with our deepest nature, and with Nature; something which traces the pattern for your next steps. There is also a *third* form, which can be a mixture of types, positive or negative. I call this the ‘hesitancy form’ of organismic response. It can’t tell us which way it would be good to go because there is something like a conflict implied in it. In effect it seems to say, ‘take a little time, go into this unclear feeling and see what all is in it. If you know the powerful practice of Focusing on a ‘felt-sense’ developed by Eugene T. Gendlin[i][i], you can invite this unclear feeling to open and reveal its intricacy. As it opens various strands and facets of this felt sense of ... (whatever it is) reveal themselves, this can be extremely helpful in choosing your next steps... To put it in other words, once the various parts of this (of its intricacy) are ‘seen’ you will then be able to decide the matter more confidently. This may take a little patience or waiting for a way forward to become possible without ambiguity or hesitancy. First, the parts or details involved in the feeling must be recognized and in some way be given their due.[ii][ii]

To sum up what we’ve said so far, a most basic way of knowing if we are living from the heart, is to notice the bodily responsiveness. Do the physical feelings indicate that we are moving towards or away from what the heart is inviting us to do; towards or away from what the heart wants for us? By paying attention to this little IGS you can develop skill in using it as a kind of inner compass for listening to and consulting your own heart.

The embodied-feeling-organismic aspect, of which I am speaking, is the most basic of tools you will need to be able intentionally find and listen to your own heart, anytime you want, in any situation, no matter how simple or complex it is. There are, however, a few other basic interlocking terms in this model of the heart. These are: *Center*, *Vessel*, *Doors*, and *Person*.

## **The Heart as Center**

Usually we can refer to the heart as having a kind of physical location in the center of the chest or the middle of the body. It is important to understand, however, that there are depths of the heart which reach beyond the body and its incarnate sense. Yet when we want to focus on our own hearts, we can easily do so by bringing our attention into the middle of the body. It is important to be clear that we are not talking, as some do, about the cardiac pump, the ticker which can go on beating in a jar after surgical removal, and which may have some cellular memory of the person and body who hosted it. This is a different ‘heart’ than heart theory is here speaking of. We are also not talking about the ‘heart chakra’, or ‘heart-center’ as it is sometimes called, being associated with compassion and love, although this is included in a much deeper and wider conception of heart which heart psychology embraces. I am rather speaking of our embodied yet spiritual center of being. In my other books and writings I have called it the ‘ontological center’ or the ‘navel’ of our being, or the ‘inner *axis mundi*’ of our living.[iii][iii] This Center has various depths to it, and in its deepest sense we can find a Wellspring, an inexhaustible source of energy, of life forward movement, of imagination, desire, and inspiration flowing from it. It is where dreams, visions, and the heart’s deepest longings and desires come from, and can thus be considered in a transcendent aspect. [iv][iv] To be more precise, it is where the purposeful and meaningful inspirations that I call the heart’s “Invitations” implicit in our deep desires, dreams and visions come from. This center thus has an intricacy to it, and is all these meanings, and more than we can say. It is an ever flowing and ever-present wellspring of life. In childhood most of us experience this freely, we already have it, but it gets shut down through the education and developmental processes involved in growing up and entering the adult world in Western culture. By adulthood, most people no longer know how to find it, nor how to live from it, --although they may haphazardly be in touch with it at times.

Artists often tap into aspects of it for inspiration in their work, and athletes who are performing while ‘in the zone’ no doubt are participating in it. Poets, composers, dancers, and anyone doing creative work will be tapping this wellspring at times...but often such individuals, like the rest of us, are not aware that they can tap it for any situation, small or big they are living in. Developing skill in using the organismic dimension mentioned above can be aided by attention to bodily *feeling tones* (and felt-sensing), of which we shall say more as we go along. These practices can help you intentionally consult your heart anytime you want, and any place you need to. They give you precise channels of access to the heart.

### The ‘Vessel of the Heart’

Most discussions of the ‘heart’, and most uses of it in the World’s mythology and spiritual literature focus on primarily on this ‘Center’ aspect of the heart. But experiential phenomenology shows that there are more facets of the heart than this. I have found there is also an ability to go *inside* the heart and ‘look’ around, ‘feel’ around, ‘see’ what all’s *there*, ‘see’ whatever content or baggage we are carrying around. This implies a kind of *space* in the heart, as the ‘Vessel’ image suggests. When you “go inside” you can take a ‘look-see’ at what is inside you. Often we find many contents ‘in there:’ *thoughts, memories, uneasy feelings, concerns, preoccupations with chores or tasks that need to be done, obsessions perhaps, and maybe a problem or two we want to solve*. There is also the presence of the Center to be found in this space, and we might also find an Invitation or creative inspiration arising in there.

For years, as a clinical psychologist, I’ve been inviting my clients to go inside at the outset of each of our therapy sessions. This has a special value because if a few minutes are spent in this way, it is easy for the client to identify what thing(s) is important to explore in this hour, and what can wait until later. So I ask them to take note of the contents they find there. Each of us carry a certain amount of content around with us, a certain amount of emotional baggage, and many other legitimate concerns as well. A ‘space’ needs to be cleared so that most of this can be identified and then set aside for now. So I ask them to identify what all is in there, and to not go into it just now, just take note of it. Once they have this inventory of all the contents in there today, I ask the client to look again and see which content or item has the most ‘energy.’ [v][v] They may have to sense this inwardly in some visceral way to get the *feel* of the energy. But once the client can select the content with the most energy, we can then open it up and explore it through various methods, usually involving some form of focusing alongside dialogic inquiry. [vi][vi] So there’s a little method to help people clear a space and create a little center, an observation point to witness content and sort out what out from *all of that* feels most relevant right now, in this moment. This content with the most energy is where we can most fruitfully explore and grapple right now. We set other things aside knowing we can deal with them *when* the time is more right for them. But right now the time is right for this one thing that has the such energy to it.

### The Heart’s Doors?

Closely related to the concept of the Vessel or inner space of the heart, and to the bodily or organismic aspect of the heart (IGS), is another interlocking concept, that of the ‘heart’s doors.’ I could use other words for this that imply opening and closing capacities: *windows, aperture, channel* and so on. I’ll just stay with doors for now. The notion of something that opens or closes is the essential point. In a way of life in which you live *from* the heart, you will progressively want to open the heart’s doors. An open heart allows you to love, feel, receive, and enter more deeply into the world, into relationships, into... *life*. Yet, an important function of these doors is that they can also close and sometimes need to. This opening and closing is tied to our capacity to feel. When we open up towards another person, we can feel this process of opening in a subtle bodily way, if we pay attention to it. We can also feel the closing of the heart. When the heart opens, we can often feel an easing and relaxing and a soft almost vulnerable feel...perhaps attended by a desire to move closer in some way. When we close up we feel a tightness, a discomfort, and guardedness, and perhaps an impulse to jerk back or get away.

The heart's doors open naturally in trusting and in loving, in caring and in tenderness, in humor, playfulness, in being creative and in becoming inspired. The doors of the heart open in the perception of beauty and in the graceful movements of a dancer. The heart's doors naturally close in fear and anger (with their defending against loss or attack qualities), in too much seriousness (keeping the world at bay quality), and in greed and in lust (with their associated clenching and grasping qualities). Another feature of the heart's doors is that they open inwardly and outwardly---towards the world, or towards the inner space and Wellspring. Some people, for example, are closed off from (or open to) the world, others from their own inner life and sources of creativity and inspiration. Other people are closed (or open) both ways.

### **Q: Is there value in closing the heart's doors?**

**A:** Certainly! I am not advocating that the heart must or should always be wide open, non stop. Sometimes its quite realistic and appropriate and natural for the heart's doors to close, for this is part of the IGS which tells us when something is not right, or when we are moving away from the heart's Invitations, or when we are in harm's way or something or someone is intruding. Part of using the IGS is sensing-knowingly what your heart is saying to you positively and negatively. It can be very useful, for example, to know when your body is telling you to pull back, or to question something more deeply because you aren't feeling quite right about it. There is also a hesitancy form in which its you feel a conflict in the doors, some wanting to open and some wanting not to open. This can come up when you need more information and time to investigate an issue before deciding upon it. So when you notice your heart is shutting against something or someone, it is time to go inside and explore and see what this is about. This is where knowing how to be attentive to the *feeling tones* is important.

### **Feeling Tones**

Feeling tones are the visceral-emotional *meanings* that *implicitly* attend any situation: your thoughts, ideas, plans, projects, obligations, relationships with people and so on. Feeling tones are rich in the intelligence and implicit wisdom of the body, and when the mind gets aligned with this natural intelligence amazing shifts in perspective and perception can occur. The heart, always implicitly communicates through the organismic *feeling tones*. It is important to keep in mind the difference between feeling tones and a felt-sense. A feeling tone about something is usually clear as soon as we notice it. A felt-sense is murky, unclear at first, and requires a little focusing on the felt sense for it to open and reveal its intricacy. With a feeling tone you know what it is about. With a felt-sense you must invite it to open. For now we are staying with feeling tones, later, in another discussion we will explore the practice of focusing on a felt-sense.

If you develop skill in noticing your feeling tones about anything or any situation, you will be able to know what the heart's doors are doing or saying with respect to them. The implications are right on the surface. The feeling tones are the signals that so often constitute the sense of organismic rightness or wrongness about some situation. Let's take a few minutes and do an experiential exercise to help us know and use this capacity. Let's call this exercise the 'first practice.' [\[vii\]](#)<sup>[vii]</sup>

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## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE FIRST PRACTICE

You will need some quiet space, and a journal and pen.

Close your eyes and let yourself imagine or bring to mind someone you really care about and enjoy being with.

Once you have them clearly in mind, notice the feeling tones in the middle of your body. Ask yourself, where do I carry the feel of all about this person in my body. Notice how you carry the *feel* of all about this person, the sound of their voice, their manner of moving, the uniquely individual expressiveness of their face, their various inner-personal qualities that you appreciate, and their idiosyncrasies. You may notice a stirring of feeling anywhere in your body, not just in the middle, but putting your attention there is a good place to begin.

Notice the quality of the feel of all that. There are no words for this feel, for these feeling tones in just noticing, accurately perceiving them with the bodily *feel*. Take a little time just to be with that feel, and hold it constant.

Take as much time as you need to be clear about the feel of this person as a whole, but without words. Then, keeping a hold on the bodily *feel* of this person while you *ask* some words to come that fit precisely this *feel*. Say them out loud or write them down in your journal.

**Sample journal entry:** *aunt Inez: I feel a low burning energy, chest softening, inward parts feel like cakes and ale, a stirring...my face smiling big now*

Now, keeping your eyes closed, let that person go and bring to mind or imagine someone who is difficult to be with, someone you are not comfortable around. Perhaps this is someone who annoys you, or painfully criticizes you, or perhaps you are not clear about why you don't want to be near them, but you just have a persistent sense that *you don't want to be around them*.

Once you have this person clearly in mind, notice the *feeling tones* in your body that come with....(whoever it is). Again, notice how you carry the *feel* of all about this person (the sound of their voice, their manner of moving, the uniquely individual expressiveness of their face, their various personal qualities that you find uncomfortable to endure or be with).

Notice the *quality* of the *feel* of all that. There are no words for this concreteness yet, for these feeling tones, just let yourself notice... without words. Take a little time just to be with that *feel*, and hold it constant as you get more acquainted with its presence (but without words).

When you feel ready, try to describe this feel in concrete words or images...If you have a journal, keep a hold on the bodily *feel* of this person while you *ask* some words to come that fit this *feel*. Take as much time as you need for the words to come.

**Sample journal entry:** *Jack. My stomach jumpy-jittery, spasmy, inward pressure, bracing, arms jerking, upper chest tightens, feels twisty..., compressing, shrinking in...*

Now allow yourself some time to move back and forth between the feel of the two people, noticing carefully the difference you feel in your organism, in your body, between the two people you chose to recall. Then write in your journal or say out loud some words that convey how the body carries the feeling tones of the caring person whom you like to be around, followed by some words that say out the implicit-meanings in the feeling tones of the person you wanted to back away from:

**Sample journal entry:** The implicit meanings I carry in my body about aunt Inez: *a feeling safety, ...of value, a sense of permission to be me...no..., not that exactly, ...it was more a sense that it s good to be me. Ahh! That's it. A warm glow in my diaphragm that seems to say, "I'm so glad you are here."*

**Sample journal entry:** The feel of all about Jack is distinctly different..... *other kinds of words come and implicit meanings come about Jack: like invading..., intruding, defending, pulling back....Ahhhh,that's it! I fold up.... and jerk back in his presence, he seems intrusive, invasive.... Violating boundaries.*

In these examples the feeling tones also carry implicit meanings which have just surfaced a little after staying with the feel of what came in the body about these two people whom you brought to mind. They are at first unclear when we attend only on the feeling tones. In another place we will be discussing a more detailed method called 'focusing' for getting at the implicit meanings, but that is beyond the scope of this introduction. Let's just zero in on the 'feeling tones', for now, because through noticing them, paying more attention we already have a vital instrument, a kind of receiving device for listening to the heart as it speaks to us through the flesh. There are always feeling tones to any person, thing (or idea or plan), or situation we are dealing with. Feeling tones tend to be clear but not usually in the foreground of awareness. By bringing them into the foreground we have a clear channel of communication with the heart. In many instances, our actions require quick adjustments to the faintest physical signals, as when we are typing, playing in sports, dancing, making love, canoeing, jogging and so on. There is a fluidity of movement that doesn't require getting at the implicit meanings, only adjusting our action or behavior to the signals that are spontaneously arising with each movement we make. [\[viii\]](#)<sup>[viii]</sup> It is the same with feeling tones. They can come like little signals that attend anything we are doing or considering doing. Attention to them can help us adjust our choices and actions in ways that honor the heart.

In general feeling tones will either be affirming (organismic rightness) and suggest that we are moving in accord with the heart's invitations or desires with respect to this person, thing, or situation, or they will be negative (organismic wrongness), suggesting that we are moving away from the heart's invitation or desire with respect to this person, thing, or situation. Failure to pay attention to the feeling tones can sometimes get us into trouble. For example I once hired a woman who was strongly recommended by a friend and colleague of mine. I so trusted this friend and colleague that I ignored the significance of my own feeling tones about the woman applying for the job. My body felt jittery, tight, and pulling back, and in effect was saying "*There is something uncomfortable about the idea of hiring her.*" Yet I trusted the recommendation, which is to say, I followed the mind and ignored my own heart and its bodily feeling tones. This turned out to be disastrous in consequence. I learned the meaning of the old expression: "*Ah...I knew it in my heart all along, I wish I would have listened!*" Living from the heart requires that we give careful consideration to these feeling tones, going deeply into them if necessary, in order to understand, and better evaluate the possibility we are considering.

Probably all of us, or most of us, have noticed and used the feeling tones from time to time, but haphazardly or accidentally. With this first practice, which you just did by bringing these two types of people to mind, you now have a little map for how to go there intentionally anytime you want, and in any situation that is arising. When you use the feeling tones like this, you are using them as a signal or indicator system, the heart's IGS. Poets and religious authorities have often considered the heart to be a feeler. It is, but this is not a precise enough statement. The heart is highly intelligent, has its own consciousness, its own deep directing wisdom, and is highly purposeful in its expression. Its capacity to feel is not simply emotions, but feeling tones which embody implicit meanings that are not yet conceptualized by the mind and which come along with the fact that the heart is intricately interlaced with the bodily organism. The feeling tones operate like the old biblical 'bowels' the instinctual-feeling centers of



ancient biblical psychology, and those bowels and the viscera like the liver were considered to be intricately intertwined with the 'heart.' The wise person was one who consulted these inward parts upon which conscience and the Spirit of God moved.

## The Person

The person is the focal point of heart theory. Without being a person, you would have no heart, no vessel to go inside and find what you are carrying around (content) or find what is troubling you. Without the person that you are, there would be no center to live from, and there would be no IGS, no feeling tones, no Invitations arising for you, and no felt-sensing to help guide a life. It is the person who lives, and who wants to live a life you care about. The implicit life principle in each of us is forward moving, it aims at something, whatever you may call it: *Individuation, becoming irreplaceably unique and whole, complete, or self-actualizing, and in spiritual terms, self-transcending.* It is the person inside, who recoils in fearful feeling tones from threat or challenge, and who wants to take delight in the world by opening the heart's doors and embracing what life brings to you. In short, it is the person who has a heart and who can develop skill in using it to chart a course in life and navigate through any situation, no matter how small or large, that arises.

It is crucial to realize that the person is not the *personality*, which is a combination of traits, conditioned patterns forged in development with whom a person may mistakenly identify. The personality, to a degree, can be changed, improved, dis-identified with, and so on, and has many stable traits. The *person*, on the other hand, is a mysterious ontological *presence*. The person is the one who has various personality traits and who has a name and so on. My granddaughter is two years old. I remember when she was born. It was an unmistakable experience when suddenly there was a new being in the family, a new person looking out from behind a pair of shiny eyes; a new and somehow unavoidable presence in the room.

Heart psychology is a little map this inner person so that *he* or *she* can find the heart, listen to it and act from it. When this happens the inner person grows, develops, expands in many directions like the unfolding petals of a lotus.[\[ix\]](#)<sup>[i]</sup> One of the most compelling and resonant phenomenological statements about the inner person and growth has been made by Eugene T. Gendlin. I find it difficult to surpass:

*"...when a person's central core or inward self expands (i.e., in a direction) it strengthens and develops, the "I" becomes stronger. The person—I mean that which looks out from behind the eyes—comes more into its own. The increasing strength and development of the person is essential to a successful psychotherapy.*

*....One develops when the desire to live and do things stirs deep down, when one's own hopes and desires stir, when one's own perceptions and evaluations carry a new sureness, when the capacity to stand one's own ground increases, and when one can consider others and their needs. This last item here is not contradictory to the others. One comes to feel one's separate existence solidly enough to want to be close to others as they really are. It is development when one is drawn to something that is directly interesting, and when one wants to play. It is development when something stirs inside that has long been immobile and silent, cramped and almost dumb, and when life's energy flows in a new way.*

*...Nothing is more important than the person inside. Therapy exists for the person inside, it has no other purpose. When that inner being comes alive, or even stirs just a little, it is more real and important than diagnosis or evaluation.* [\[x\]](#)<sup>[ii]</sup>

The heart is what draws our attention to interesting and lively things. It is the heart which stirs the imagination and arouses new life energy. The whole point of living from the heart is so that the inner person can grow, develop, and come more into its own, with new sureness, and with delight, joy, and deep satisfaction in living. Each person has an embodied heart, and in the deepest paradoxical sense, the heart is the core of each person.

## The Process of Living from the Heart

In using an experiential phenomenology to study the *process* of living from the heart, I began by asking my felt-sense of the heart process this question: *How do I live from the heart or act in accord with the heart in any situation, large or small?* This led to the discovery of three distinguishable, yet fluidly connected phases in combination with the use of the IGS and its feeling tones accompanying each phase of the fluid process. The three phases apply to any situation, no matter how large or small in significance, and no matter how short or long the process is in duration. [xi][i] The phases are identifiable and distinguishable, but the actual experience of them is more fluid with each phase having its moment to shine as it fades into the next which has its moment of radiance before....,or... like one wave carrying its energy into the next wave, and so on. It is important to keep this in mind when thinking of the phases. It is also important to keep in mind that listening to the heart's invitations requires that you make room within yourself to listen. Without 'clearing a space' to listen to the 'still small voice' moving within, how could we listen to the Invitations that arise in our hearts?

### The Invitation phase

#### the Honoring phase

#### The Enactment phase.[xii][ii]

## The Heart's Invitations

In the way I am using the term here, an "Invitation", is inclusive of an inspiration, an insight, a dream or vision of something the heart wants or inspires you to do. The word "Invitation" seems to stick because what it refers to is not a demand but a possibility for acting or living in some specific way, just now. This possibility comes as an "offer" to take it up and make it happen. When we think of receiving an invitation from someone, there is an implied 'Issuer' of the Invitation...which comes 'as if' from someone else, or from some place else. Now it is important to say that there are many other places to live from besides your own heart. You can, for example, live from the wishes of others, from efforts to be like others, or from a desire to please others. You can live in your head, with your thoughts only, and ignore the heart and bodily feeling. You can live from emotional places like hatred, greed, or lust, and they can each rule your life. Heart psychology, by contrast, is about living from *your* Center, that is,... *living from the heart*. The 'Issuer' of Invitations is always implicit in it.

Only in living from the heart's Invitations will your life gain the sense of delight and deep satisfaction. The heart's invitations stir up new energy, lure you forward into new developments, and aim at *seasonally relevant*[xiii][iii] inspirations in response to your situation year by year, day by day, moment by moment. By way of amplification, this is analogous to living in accord with Tao. The word 'Tao' is difficult to translate because it means 'way' as well as being "led along the way" when in Tao. This being led by Tao is closely analogous to following the heart's Invitations. Rudolf Ritesma writes:

It [Tao] traces a way or path which is potentially, reflected in each individual being. To be 'in Tao' or connected to Tao is to experience meaning and move to the energy of life. This is fundamental value. It is experienced as meaning, joy, freedom, connection, compassion, creativity, insight.[xiv][iv]

This 'tracing' of the 'way' or 'path' implies a source of tracing or design that is deeper than, other than, or transcendent to the person. It comes to the person who opens the heart's doors to it. We must become open to the heart's Invitations the way the Taoist seeks to become open to the course "traced" by Tao. The Invitations carry this transcendent or transpersonal value, without really stating it explicitly. I mention it here by way of analogy to help us grasp that an Invitation is not created by us, it "comes" to us.



## **The Honoring**

The word “Honoring” was chosen as a term for the second phase because implicitly an Invitation wants to be honored, which is to say, it ‘wants’ to be taken seriously, given respect, considered, contemplated, if viable, planned out in some detail, and eventually put into practice, which brings us to the third phase term, “Enactment.”

## **The Enactment**

Enactment begins with the decision to “make it happen” or “bring it on line,” ...to realize a possibility in fact. The enactment follows through into whatever action steps are needed or are implied until the enactment is completed. Depending on the complexity of the Invitation, there may be many smaller cycles in this of these three phases as well as specific problems, possibilities and decision points arising. These, then, are the meanings of the terms of the three phase process, and it is most useful to keep aware of the feeling tones at each phase, for you can check your ideas, wishes, or intentions against them. If there is some discord in the feeling tones, you will then want to go into them more deeply and explore them to see why this discordance is there, and see what might be required to resolve it. There are a plethora of examples I could offer as instances of this fluid, three-phase process. Some instances are simple and occur very quickly, such as in contemplating what color to add to a painting this morning. But the three phase process can be so complex that considerable periods of time, persistence, and recycling through the three phases are required. A major life change such as a career change, a change in marital status or of geographical location are examples of a more complex process occurring over a significant period of time. The structure of the process is the same, but its duration, the recycling of phases over time, and the persistence required varies significantly from the simpler forms.

## **Personal Example:**

### **Three Fluid-Phases and the Use of the IGS**

I would like to share a little personal story as a way of presenting the four principles of living from the heart. Although I have been living a version of heart theory as described in this book, for 30 years, the real impetus to define it and put it in written form is an inspiration born from suffering that arose three years ago with the death of my mother. I received a call one morning saying that my mother was seriously ill. A few hours later the diagnosis of liver cancer was conferred, and over the next five weeks she rapidly deteriorated and suffered pain greatly, before dying in a moment of peace, with a smile on her lips. This illness seemed to appear out of the blue, and my whole family was so caught up in dealing with her day to day struggle with the illness and her rapid deterioration, we didn’t have time to grasp what was happening until after she was buried. For weeks afterward I found myself reading death poetry, driving slowly past every cemetery, and journaling about death and loss of the mother.

My pain was deep, and for awhile my life slowed down into a ritual of mourning. I constructed an altar on the coffee table with photos of my mother and a candle, incense and a green branch I clipped off a pine tree. I did this intentionally to provoke my grief, to help me process the feelings of shock, loss, anger, and confusion that attended her rapid demise and death. For a few weeks, perhaps three, I was preoccupied with mourning, and then there was a shift to more of a contemplation on death itself, and my own mortality. I sensed, at age 51, that my life would be over all too soon. Thinking of my own death was not new, but the sense of the brevity of my own life was. I found myself growing restless and discontent over the next several weeks and this discontent gradually clarified itself as a sense of urgency to get on with whatever it is I must do with the remainder of my life. Since I had already been living from my heart for a long time, and I had fulfilled most of my wishes and dreams, “What was this urgency about?” I inquired more deeply, explored my own felt-sense of this question and what eventually came was a sense of needing to transition into the next phase of my life, a move from primarily doing therapy towards more writing, teaching, and mentoring. Yet this wasn’t quite right. Something else was stirring in me. “What was it?”

## **The Arising of the Invitation**

I kept focusing on my *felt-sense* of that and gradually it opened like this: A sense came of wanting to find some land in a forest or wilderness area where I could develop it into a retreat setting. I sat quietly with this for a while and then more detail came: “*Perhaps a place I might run workshops, and consult with people, ... perhaps do more supervision and mentoring.*” These were the thoughts that were progressively coming. I still had no *definite* or *final* sense of how all that would look, nor of what specific forms it would take.

I kept paying attention to the bodily feel of this emerging invitation, still waiting for more clarity. I did feel sure, however, that this was the ‘direction’ in which the heart was inviting me to go. It wanted me to find some land. Not just any piece of land, but some very specific kind of location. Just where this would be and what it would be like I had only an unclear notion, until I eventually found it. This fussiness of the heart about what it wants is worth noting. When it first issues an invitation, it is typically not clear, and yet it is not wide open either. Something is highly specific, and won’t be satisfied until it is found, honored, and enacted. The mind wants clarity but the heart’s way of speaking to us is at first often unclear, yet persistent and definite in some way that refuses to be satisfied with anything less than what it wants, what it is aiming at.

## **Shifting into the Honoring**

The invitation to acquire the right piece of secluded woodland became clear, and already I found myself honoring it by searching for possible candidates for purchase. So for the next month I spent my days off driving into the rural areas in search of property without much of an idea of where to look beyond a country location, and without any specific idea of the shape and specific features required of such a property. I looked at many “for sale” candidates, but none of them would match the highly particular demands of the heart. Time passed and I kept searching on Tuesday afternoons. Then it finally happened. One Tuesday I found it, and knew it in a flash, felt it in my body with such a *feel* of rightness—like the *feel* of destiny. On the surface it was nothing to look at, although it struck me as a marvelous piece of woodlands, very secluded. But it had a dilapidated house on it, and literally tons of junk to haul out of the woods, but I knew, as if having been led there from on high, that this was the place, ... “this would be mine!” was the sense of it. I then set about dreaming of the possibilities about this piece of land. I did architecture drawings, and drew up remodeling plans. I visited lumber yards and home improvement centers to get ideas about prices. I checked my own finances and borrowing power, and once I felt I had the clarity and resources to make an offer.

## **Shifting to the Enacting**

I made my decision to purchase and immediately followed through in making the official offer to purchase through my realtor. There was a little back and forth between the seller and me, and within a couple of days the cost and terms were agreed upon. Within a few weeks I had title to the property and had begun the process of cleaning up, demolishing old structures, remodeling, building new structure, and so on. I divided the project into its own phases: clean up the land, then gut the house, then build on new rooms, the wire and plumb, the sheet rock, paint, and put in new floors, paint, hardwood, and so on. Each of these projects also entailed repeatedly consulting the heart, getting new invitations, honoring them, and enacting them, as various challenges and problems presented themselves. In the larger sense of the over-all renovation and development of home and wilderness retreat center, I am still in phase of Enacting the initial Invitation.

## **SOME USEFUL TIPS**

### **Protecting the Newly Forming**

Any process of living or acting from the heart is a creative process. Something new is forming and trying to come into being, trying to live. The more we live creatively, the more we truly do live, and this living is attended with delight and satisfaction. It is very important to understand that anything new that is forming needs protection for awhile so that it can become established, well formed, sturdy enough to endure in the face of forces that might crush it. To protect something is to safeguard it, defend it, cover it, look after it. 'Looking after' is a type of caring for... to paraphrase Gendlin, we don't want someone to drop a load of concrete on the new green shoot, especially before it has had a chance to live and become strong. This is something I always emphasize with my psychotherapy clients, the need to protect the new developments, the new powers that are forming.

In the artist's studio, the painting in process may be covered with a cloth, to protect it from prematurely prying eyes, from remarks that people might make that could be intrusive and come between the artists and the source from which he or she is painting. Potters place a cheese cloth over the wet clay form, to keep it moist and safe while they are away from it and it is still in process. Bakers may put a soft cloth over bread dough as it rises, to keep it from drying too quickly, and perhaps to keep flies off. The personal journal is kept away from curiously prying eyes. We need to take care of newly forming creatures, regardless of whether they be personal powers and potentials, or art, or a work project, or a new design, or a poem that is forming, or a new skill, or a new idea or vision for our life and work. Protecting means taking responsibility for sheltering it, insuring its survival, guarding against premature criticism.

You must take responsibility not to share your new idea or forming product before it is ready. You must assume responsibility for knowing when it is formed enough to be open to sharing, feedback, or whatever it is you are wanting by sharing it. If you are in a close relationship with another individual, a friend, a spouse, or a colleague you need to check within and know when it is right to share and to not share. When you do share, you need to take responsibility for letting this other person know exactly what kind of response you are open to from them. You might, for example, just want this person to listen and not comment. You might want them to just take delight in the new thing, or revel in it with you, but not criticism or feedback. You also might be ready for feedback or helpful questions, and don't want their confirmation about whether or not this thing seems good to them or not. Whatever it is you want by sharing, be clear about this and make sure you have taken pains to see that this other person understands. Otherwise, do not share it. Beware of any tendency to seek approval for what has genuinely come from your own heart and experiencing. You can trust, honor, and be proud of what has come from here. You can rest in the authority of your inner source. You do not need approval for it from some source other than your own heart. Thus resolve to protect your newly forming or newly formed thing until it is sturdy enough to be let out into the world, and be established there. In the three fluid phases of Invitation, Honoring, and Enactment, these words about protection are important all along the way. In a sense protecting is a way of honoring, but protecting plays a role in each of the three phases. In a sense, each phase is implicit in the others, so protecting as an aspect of honoring must accompany each phase.

### **Watch Out for The Inner Critic [the Judge]**

While speaking of 'protecting' it is important to know that we not only need to protect this newly forming... from other people, but also from ourselves, or rather, from that aspect of our minds that is highly critical. This 'inner critic' is the very devil when it comes to being creative, living creatively. There is a conditioned pattern in the mind, it has a kind of inner voice and it is always telling us we aren't good enough, or we aren't ready to... or we don't know enough to... or we don't have a right to... or we aren't creative enough to... Whatever it says, it is incessant and itself not creative. It doesn't tell us anything new, and it seems only to want to stop our creative movement. Don't let it. When you sense this going on, interrupt it, ask it to come back when it has something new or creative to say. Above all, protect your new thing from this Critic as much as you would from another person

who is discouraging or harshly criticizing. Books on how to write often advise the writer to get a draft finished before editing. This is because editing involves self-criticism and this stops the flow of what is forming. Let it form first, then look at it critically and ask how you might improve the piece. This is a legitimate task for the inner critic, and good advice for anyone trying to live and act from the heart. Enfold your process of living forward from the heart as if in the wings of an archangel.

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