



BERATEN – BEGLEITEN - BEGEISTERN

## „A new culture of the heart“

by Alexander Schwedeler

# A new culture of the heart

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**I want to explore the role of the heart in human physiology and in human relationships. A look at the functional principles of the human body reveal interesting new aspects on the role of the heart, which may add to the common understanding of how our body is functioning. It shows the heart as a sensory organ. This sensing ability of the heart may enrich relationship building, such as dialog and cooperation.**

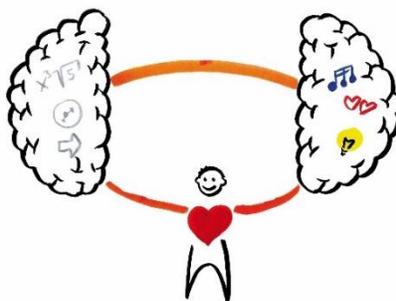
Within the human body we basically find three systems, which function in their very own specific way, and which work together in harmony as one.

The first system to mention is the nerves and senses system. With the help of our senses, like our eyes, ears, and nose, we are able to perceive the world we are living in. Our nerves carry the information towards and into the brain. Here we experience our ability to think and put our perceptions into perspective by bringing them together with the concepts. The nerves and senses system has its center in the brain, but it is also everywhere spread out through the whole human organism. Information processes like perception, thinking and coordination of body movements predominate.

The second system to mention is the metabolic and limbs system. It is concentrated in the lower part of the body, but metabolic processes also are happening throughout the whole body. In contrast to the nerves and senses system the metabolic system is based on the body's direct contact with the material world. Through the passage way from our mouth to the stomach, we ingest substances from the environment. These, however, are not simply incorporated into the body as they are, but are first broken down into their basic building blocks (in the case of proteins right

down to their constituent amino acids), in order then to be integrated into the body's own substance. This stimulates, within the organism, processes of life and growth, which thus become the body's own metabolic processes. The main function here is to destroy, digest, and subsequently to build-up again, to energize. Part of this energy is then being used in the metabolism of our tissues and muscles.

Functionally, the metabolic and nervous systems form a polarity. They are complementary and mutually antagonistic in all aspects of their organization. The nervous system is rather calm and rational, highly complex, coordinating all body movements. The metabolic system is warm, full of energy, it destroys nutrition and rebuilds it according to the body's needs.



Both systems can only function well through the action of a third basic system, the circulatory-respiratory system. This system, which can also be called the heart-rhythm system consists of the blood circulation, the rhythmically functioning heart and the respiration, or breathing system. Both, circulation and breathing,

work rhythmically. When we breathe-in our heart rhythm, measured in beats per minute increases. When we breathe-out the heart beats per minute decrease again.

Breathing-in also means that we refresh the old blood in the lung with oxygen. The refreshed blood then streams again through the body. And breathing-out carries carbon, one of the elements of the old, or used, blood, into the atmosphere outside of us.

The circulatory system functions as the 'transporter' and 'distributor' of energy and oxygen. With the help of the blood vessels, the basic nutritive building blocks absorbed by the gut are transported to the liver, where they are re-synthesized. The newly formed substances can then be transported by means of the blood vessels to those tissues and muscles where they are functionally required. Surplus substances can also be stored, but are mostly excreted. Such metabolism depends upon a reliably functioning blood circulation.

When we look at the circulatory and respiratory system in this context we find that the heart seems to be following the movement of the blood than determining its pressure by pumping. Latest research supports evidence that the heart's main function is not as a pump, but much more as a sensory organ to the nutrition needs of the tissues. Branco Furst writes in his book "The Heart and Circulation - An Integrative Model" (Springer, London 2014): "According to the mechanistic (cardio centric) mode, the blood is considered an inert fluid, impelled along the vessels by the pressure gradient created by the heart. Experimental and phenomenological evidence presented in this monograph suggests exactly the opposite, namely, that the blood is a 'fluid organ', with self movement as its inherent characteristic. Conceptually, autonomous

movement of the blood is no different than autonomous contraction of the heart...". Furst also looks at the embryonic development. Here we see that circulation of blood is happening before there is any heart. The heart is being built out of the movement of the blood.

It follows from this perspective, that the heart is an organ which is rather serving, than pumping, which is more a sensory organ than an active pushing one. Of course, the heart beats and pumps rhythmically. It does so because of its close relation with the lung and our respiratory system. Here we breathe in and out in a rhythmic way. The heart takes over that rhythm in its own pulsation. But, when for instance our blood pressure is too high, the heart provides the body with another function: it takes out the pressure of the blood, which is coming with too high pressure into its direction. So here, the heart is doing the opposite of pumping. It lowers blood pressure instead of giving it pressure by pumping. The research done at the Heartmath Institute in Colorado provides a lot of scientific research related to these questions (see [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org)).

We will now look at some less physical aspects of our being: our thinking ability, our ability to feel and experience, and our ability to act. A more popular way to point to these would be to speak about head, heart and hand. I suggest to look at them as we experience them. We experience our thinking in the area of the head. Our feelings are being felt in the area of our breast and stomach. And acting has very much to do with the muscles and limbs. It is very interesting to discover that these three soul qualities have their physiological basis in the above mentioned three systems, each one in its 'own' system: thinking has its physiological basis in the nerves and senses system; willing has its physiological basis in the metabolic and limbs system; and feeling has its physiological basis in the heart-rhythm system.

We can check it out ourselves. Every little or bigger emotion has its parallel reaction in the heart, in the changing color of the skin, in the breathing rhythm. This can be directly measured with the help of biofeedback technologies, which make the changes of the heart rhythm visible. This is called the heart rate variability, or HRV (see [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org)).

In a similar way our actions are only possible with metabolic activities in the muscles and their coordination through the nervous system. Here a question arises: how does movement of the human being actually take place? Is it the brain that gives the 'order' to a muscle to move, or is it the warm energy, our interest in the world, which flows through us via the heart and blood into the muscle and there results in movement?

For thinking we understand that it has its physiological basis in the nervous system. Regarding feeling we can sense better now that it has a direct reflection in our circulatory and respiratory system. The will, is more hidden. We have will-energy within our thinking, when we concentrate on one question. We have will-energy when we move our body. What is then will-energy? Maybe it is connected to the element of warmth. Warmth permeates through our whole body. When we are not feeling well then often our body feels cold. It can also feel too hot when we have a fever. When we think about warmth within our body we can sense that it is closely connected to our inner state of being, to our I, or Self.

But warmth is also connected to our relationships. A good relationship is warm-hearted. Our interest in the other is filled with warmth and love. Let's explore the question of interest a bit more. Our specific interests lead us through life. For example, we are interested in a certain country. We will certainly then travel to this country. We see the nature there and meet people. It

might be that we make good friends there. Or, we have a certain interest in a specific profession. We study the subject and find a workplace in our area of interest. There we meet others and build working relationships, but also personal relationships. We therefore can conclude that it is our interest which leads us through life. But within this perceivable interest I suggest that it is warmth, which gives the necessary energy and direction.

I mentioned earlier that it is our nervous system which coordinates movement. It is important to combine these findings. When our interest and enthusiasm for an action drives us, moves us, then it is our nervous system which coordinates this energy. This is a highly complex functionality. We may get an idea what I mean here when we look for instance at how we learn a craft, an art, or how to play an instrument, or do sports. We have an aim, an image, a will to learn it. There is a lot of energy involved, and exercise, repetition. And finally we can say we are able to perform. In all this the nervous system is supporting coordination of the movement. But the movement itself is driven by the will to learn, act, play, or run.

Our heart is especially able to sense warmth and cold in any situation. We only need to learn to listen to this much better than we normally do. Also, the heart often tells us what to do. We know already what is right or wrong. But in many cases our logic prevails and we do something different. Afterwards we admit that our heart, our feelings, new that the decision was wrong, but we did not listen to it. We need more courage to listen to our heart and act accordingly. We need more courage to say: "This does not feel good to me, let's not do it - but I cannot yet tell why."

When we are enthusiastic about an idea for action, this enthusiasm triggers warmth throughout the soul and body. It influences our breathing rhythm. This effects our circulation. The blood brings oxygen and other nutrients to those muscles which are going to move. Furst summarizes his collection of recent scientific research regarding the heart and circulation by pointing to the red blood cells, which have retained a unique form of sensitivity. They sense the metabolic needs of the tissues and muscles. They are a mobile sensor for the oxygen requirements of the tissues. The sensing red blood cells therefore play an important role in making movement of the body possible. The heart with its sensory function supports the circulation of blood towards the tissues, and it transports the nutrients necessary. The nerves and senses system senses and coordinates, the heart rhythm system also senses, but also transports, and the metabolic limbs system enables movement. But the impulse and direction come from myself with warmth and enthusiasm.

This collection of observations and recent scientific research point to a broadening of the common perspective of the human as a purely brain centered being. It has important implications. When we believe that everything we think, feel and do has its origin in the brain, consequently freedom is not possible then. In that case we are finally reduced to a state of biochemical and nervous reaction within the brain and every thought, feeling and movement is predetermined. With that image of the human being in mind I can understand the proponents of Transhumanism. They work to create machines much more intelligent than we are and aim for copying themselves onto such machines in order to live forever and much more comfortable and intelligently. Some say that the first such machines will be functioning in 2029 onwards.

But what if the image of the human being is actually much more than just a state of biochemical and neuronal reactions? What if the human being has its core in the I, or higher Self, which expresses itself through

thinking, feeling and willing, and which uses a highly complex threefold human body, including three independently functioning systems which act as one? What if movement, social encounter, relationships, community building, is actually based on the degree of warmth and interest of us human beings in the other individual?

Then the role of the heart can be understood in a new way. It is a highly effective sensory organ and closely connected to our higher Self, which expresses itself through warmth and interest. The new culture of the heart will focus on relationship building first, then acting and doing things together, in groups, in pairs of two, in constant dialog with each other, developing the next steps in good cooperation. And finally we will learn to sense and feel what ideas emerge in our heads and we will be able to take them up, or leave them go, as we like and on free decision.

In further articles I would like to explore the consequences of this view on the human being and community building in more depth, including some of the many details and open questions which need further research and reflection.



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My name is Alexander Schwedeler, 1963. I have worked in finance for the last 20 years. Between 1999 and 2006 I worked as Fund Manager for a new private equity fund, which invested in organic food and renewable energy companies. From 2008, as Co-Managing Director, I started, together with my new team, the German Branch of Triodos Bank, and grew it up to 40 people and a balance sheet of 250m. I have financed many green, ethical and inspiring initiatives and businesses, including schools and health care institutions. Between 2010 and 2012 I attended the first masterclass of Otto Scharmer's TheoryU with 70 people from around the world. Since 2014 I am working as Leadership Consultant for impulse work, team building, organisational development, and conflict solving. I am a member of the Institut für Man and Organisationsentwicklung, IMO, see [www.het-imo.net](http://www.het-imo.net). IMO is based on the ideas of Bernard Lievegoed, who started the first with organisation development consultancy in the 50ies of the last century.

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