

The Origins and Nature of Consciousness: The Heart Doctrine, Part One

Christopher P. Holmes

when I die, the "I" will be lost forever, too.
Isaac Asimov, material scientist

*What he sees in the inmost recesses of his heart
is his real "I," his God.*
Sri Chinmoy, mystic

*Learn above all to separate Head-learning from Soul-Wisdom,
the "Eye" from the "Heart" doctrine.
But even ignorance is better than Head-learning
with no Soul-wisdom to illuminate and guide it...
The "Doctrine of the Eye" is for the crowd,
the "Doctrine of the Heart," for the elect...
"Great Sifter" is the name of the "Heart Doctrine."
H.P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, 1889*

Abstract

The issues of consciousness are profoundly important from both a scientific and an individual perspective. What is this "I" in me—this inner self awareness? Is there some type of mystical "I" that is more than simply a collection of molecules or a pack of neurons? Where could such an "I" come from and what types of experience are possible for human beings during life and after death? The *Heart Doctrine* is an inquiry into the ultimate origin and nature of human consciousness, as well as into the issues of the existence or non-existence of the human soul and soul. The approach is to contrast "the head doctrine"—the major twentieth century scientific theory of consciousness—with "the heart doctrine," which is derived from ancient and modern esoteric and spiritual teachings. This comparative study provides a valuable alternative approach to the deep mysteries and enigmas of consciousness and it highlights many of the assumptions underlying modern scientific views.

The Mysteries of Consciousness

What is the nature of human consciousness? Psychologists, scientists and philosophers use this term in a hundred and one ways with a thousand and one meanings and interpretations. Within the scientific and popular literature as well as in common discussion, there is widespread confusion and misunderstanding regarding the issues of consciousness. Further, people do not generally

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question the nature of consciousness within themselves or even have a language in which to talk about such things.

The contemporary scientific literature demonstrates how much scientists are in the dark about the mysteries of consciousness. This is exemplified by a *Scientific American* article—“The Quest to Find Consciousness”—published in a special issue on the mind (2004). The most certain comments, offered by G. Roth, regarding consciousness are that “a true understanding of the phenomenon remains elusive,” and further, “For now, no definitive explanations exist . . .”¹ Science journalist John Horgan in *The Undiscovered Mind* (1999) came to a similar conclusion: “Mind-scientists and philosophers cannot even agree on what consciousness is, let alone how it should be explained.”² The Dalai Lama simply states: “I do not think current neuroscience has any real explanation of consciousness itself.”³

Interestingly, John Horgan quotes Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, who suggests that someone may find “deep and fruitful commonalities between Western views of the mind and those incorporated into the philosophy and religion of the Far East.” Gardner states that a fundamentally new insight is necessary in order to understand consciousness, although, unfortunately, “we can’t anticipate the extraordinary mind because it comes from a funny place that puts things together in a funny kind of way.”⁴ Gardner’s comments are ironic, as indeed there exists a fundamental difference between Western scientific views of consciousness and the mind as centered in the brain, and both Eastern and Western spiritual and esoteric traditions with the emphasis upon the heart. Understanding this difference between *the head doctrine* and *the heart doctrine* will certainly provide a novel perspective on the issues of consciousness and put things together in a “funny kind of way.”

What is the nature and origin of human consciousness? These are issues of profound importance not only to science, but also to us individually, in terms of understanding the meaning and significance of our lives. Unfortunately, science’s entire approach to con-

sciousness may be fundamentally misguided. The mysteries of consciousness are far deeper than imagined by Roth, who ends up associating the seat of consciousness with the association areas of the cerebral hemispheres in interaction with other mid-brain structures. Roth embodies the head doctrine. Further, scientists generally have no idea of the profound alternative mystical and spiritual viewpoints on these issues of consciousness.

The issues of human consciousness are also central to the contemporary debate between science and religion, and to the question of the existence of God. The debate between science and religion hinges on the issue of the origin and nature of consciousness. Is consciousness a product of material processes as science claims, or does it originate from within spiritual, metaphysical or divine realms?

To begin, the term consciousness can be taken generally to refer to the *inner awareness of being*, which each of us has. Although we might see another person’s physical body, we can never directly view their inner world of consciousness or their inner experience of being. Yet, in a very real sense, it is within this inner world that each of us has our existence. Hence, in order to understand consciousness, we must make an effort to understand it within ourselves through direct inner awareness and experience. This approach supplements other scientific approaches that rely upon external observers and intellectual theories, and it is the essential method of the mystics, yogis and masters of the esoteric traditions. Such individual explorations of consciousness have hardly been considered within the mainstream of modern thought, which also propagates varied misleading ideas on the subject. The Dalai Lama explains, “it is clear that the third-person method—which has served science so well in many areas—is inadequate to the explanation of consciousness.”⁵

The Head Doctrine

For decades, psychologists dismissed the study of consciousness since it was too difficult to study empirically and borders on

such “unscientific” pursuits as religion and metaphysics. Behaviorist John Watson remarked that no one had ever seen a soul in a test tube and that the study of consciousness was just as elusive as that of the soul. Nevertheless, in the second half of the twentieth century, consciousness re-emerged within academic psychology and neuroscience as a legitimate area of study. However, scientists embraced extremely limited views of consciousness and most often equated it with thinking and other cognitive processes of the mind. It is assumed that consciousness is produced by the brain’s material neurological processes and/or by information processes. The head doctrine is the most commonly accepted Western scientific and psychological model of consciousness. However, the nature of consciousness has remained the most mysterious of all psychological phenomena.

In the *Scientific American* article by Roth, “The Quest to Find Consciousness,” it is simply assumed that consciousness is generated somehow within the brain from material processes. Yet, when we read Roth’s article for scientific insights into consciousness, we come up quite empty-handed. A small table entitled “Fast Facts: The Rise of Awareness” includes these three points:

1. How does consciousness, with its private and subjective qualities, emerge from the physical information processing conducted by the brain?
2. Recently neuroscientists have focused on the neural correlates—the activities in the brain that are most closely associated with consciousness.
3. To date, no “center” for the phenomenon has revealed itself, but advances in imaging have helped in the study of the brain areas that are involved during consciousness.⁶

Of course, there is not a single “fact” in the table—only questions or assumptions. There is absolutely no proof that consciousness emerges “from the physical information processing” in the brain or from “the neural correlates.” Although presented as “fast

facts,” these views are really nothing more than simple assumptions.

When it comes to states of consciousness, Roth offers a pretty limited scheme of consideration from a so-called scientific perspective:

Any effort to understand consciousness must begin by noting that it comprises various states... At one end of the spectrum is the so-called alertness (or vigilance) state. States of lower consciousness include drowsiness, dozing, deep sleep and on down to coma.⁷

A normal state of “alertness” is put at one end of the continuum, as if this is the highest possible state of consciousness a human being can experience, and the other levels are below it—down into coma and the extinction of consciousness in death. It is assumed that there are no states of consciousness beyond basic vigilance—hence no Self-consciousness, cosmic consciousness, spiritual or God consciousness.

Nevertheless, the basic assumption that the brain produces consciousness seems most reasonable, and few scientists question it—despite the fact that they are completely unable to establish how or where the brain produces consciousness or what exactly this consciousness is. Nevertheless, putting aside these uncertainties, theorists share the view of prominent neurologist Roger Sperry, who remarked: “I don’t see any way for consciousness to emerge or be generated apart from a functioning brain.”⁸ Of course, Sperry also cannot see how consciousness emerges from a functioning brain, but this seems to escape his attention.

While most people would consider that understanding human consciousness is somewhat irrelevant to their life apart from posing issues in science, this is simply not the case. In fact, if the strictly material conceptualization of consciousness is true, then this has profound implications for the nature and significance of human existence. Scientist Isaac Asimov identifies the most important of these:

The molecules of my body, after my conception, added other molecules and arranged the whole into more and more complex forms, and in a unique fashion, not quite like the arrangement in any other living thing that ever lived. In the process, I developed, little by little, into a conscious something I call “I” that exists only as the arrangement. When the arrangement is lost forever, as it will be when I die, the “I” will be lost forever, too.⁹

This is the gist of the head doctrine. Human beings are material beings whose consciousness lives and dies with their functioning brains. When the molecules or neurons are destroyed, consciousness is no more, and so life ends at death and the “I” is lost forever. In the same vein, Carl Sagan elaborated a strictly materialist position:

The mind is merely what the brain does. There’s nothing else, there’s no soul or psyche that’s not made out of matter, that isn’t a function of 10 to the 14th synapses in the brain.¹⁰

In this view, there is no individual singular “I” in a living being, and we are instead nothing but a “pack of neurons” (as described by Francis Crick) or an arrangement of material molecules.

Current scientific thinking also tends to regard consciousness as being *non-substantive*—that is, as nothing in itself. According to this view, there is no way for consciousness to exist separately from or beyond the mind and the body, because conscious-

Current scientific thinking tends to regard consciousness as being *non-substantive*—that is, as nothing in itself. According to this view, there is no way for consciousness to exist separately from or beyond the mind and the body, because consciousness has literally no substance in itself—it is no thing. Rather, it is an epiphenomenon produced by material and electrical processes.

ness has literally no substance in itself—it is no thing. Rather, it is an epiphenomenon produced by material and electrical processes. Psychologists and scientists further reject any animistic or vital principle within the life of a human being and deny the existence of spirit or soul. There is no modern psychology as a science of the soul in the mainstream of science or academia. Similarly, scientists have banished spirit from their considerations of nature and the universe. Life is viewed as having been created according to natural laws and principles governing material processes, rather than being created by a higher dimensional power or any metaphysical means.

Whereas humans used to invoke God, or gods, to make sense of the unknown and to interpret the meaning of life in terms of supernatural forces, scientists suppose that their discoveries of natural forces and laws have done away with the need for such religious and mythic explanations. Carl Sagan, the esteemed popular science writer, gave voice to this sentiment when he declared, “As we learn more and more about the universe, there seems less and less for God to do.” (1979) However, when it comes to the central enigma of modern science concerning the nature of consciousness, scientists have made no progress at all and may have many wrong ideas and misguided theories.

In summary, according to the mainstream of contemporary science, human beings are material biological beings, the result of the blind evolutionary processes of random mutation and natural selection. In fact, all the phenomena of nature are believed to have occurred in a God-less universe, governed by chance and

the mechanical functioning of natural laws. In this view, human life and the life of the universe are the fortunate by-products of material processes, ranging from those of subatomic physics to those of evolution and neurology. Consciousness and mind are most frequently equated with the sum of neurological and psychological processes located within the material brain centered in the head. This is the basic head doctrine of modern science, and there is considered to be no real “I” within a human being.

The Heart Doctrine

The heart doctrine is a unifying principle found within the major religious teachings of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, Egyptian and indigenous cultural teachings, as well as in numerous other mystery teachings.

Eastern Sources

In a *Psychology Today* interview (1976), Guru Bawa, an Eastern sage, made these rather startling comments about Western psychology and the common misunderstanding of Self. According to the guru, psychologists are quite deluded about the origin of the mind (or consciousness):

“I studied psychology once, and I became crazy,” Bawa responded in a playful tone. “I lost all my powers... Psychologists don’t know where the mind is. Some think it is in the brain. Others think it is in the genitals. Others think it is in the ass. But the mind is in the heart, and that is what psychologists do not know. Unless the heart opens, you will be driven crazy by the monkeys of the mind.”¹¹

This is a telling diagnosis of modern psychology and science. Certainly scientists are in a sad predicament if they do not know where the mind is or where consciousness originates! Yet, from a spiritual perspective, this is precisely the case.

Guru Bawa describes some psychologists as thinking that the mind is in the brain—as in the modern head doctrine. Others relate it to the genitals—in reference to Freudian psy-

chology with its focus on human sexuality; or “in the ass”—in reference to the Kundalini, a primordial instinctual energy locked within the root chakra described in yoga psychology. However, Bawa insists, “The mind is in the heart.” The deepest, most essential Mind and Self are established within the heart and more primary than what the yogis refer to as the “monkeys of the mind.” In this viewpoint, mainstream psychology, philosophy and science alike are fundamentally mistaken about the nature of consciousness, mind and self. They are not *Knowers of Self* as described throughout mystical and esoteric literature.

Sri Chinmoy, another contemporary spiritual teacher, stresses the heart doctrine and also diagnoses human beings’ common ignorance as to the true nature of Self:

He does not know himself precisely because he identifies himself with the ego and not with his real “I.” What compels him to identify himself with this pseudo “I”? It is Ignorance. And what tells him that the real “I” is not and can never be the ego? It is his self-search. What he sees in the inmost recesses of his heart is his real “I,” his God.^{12 13}

Human beings lack true self-knowledge and are asleep to their deeper nature as spiritual beings. According to esotericists and mystics, we live in *ignorance*—identifying Self with the thoughts, feelings, desires and sensations that make up the contents of the mind and our personal daily dramas. All the while, we do not know Self, or “real I,” as related to the subtle mystical dimensions of the heart.

Ramana Maharshi, an Indian sage and mystic, similarly described the Self as related to the Heart Center—deeper than the personal or ego level of the mind centered in the head:

The final goal (of yoga, or life) may be described as the resolution of the mind in its source which is God, the Self; in that of technical yoga, it may be described as the dissolution of the mind in the Heart lotus... The mind and the breath spring from the same source. They arise in the heart, which is the centre of the self-

luminous Self... Where the “I” thought has vanished, there the true Self shines as “I.” “I” in the heart... The “I,” the Self, alone is real. As there is no other consciousness to know it, it is consciousness.¹⁴

“I” or “Self” is identified most intimately with the spiritual and Soul dimensions of the heart and is connected therein to God. The goal of yoga is the dissolution of the mind into its source—within the heart lotus or center. The Self is “self-luminous” and “shining”—having an inherent light nature—and this self-luminous Self is “consciousness itself.” Consciousness is the light of Self.

Ramana Maharshi elaborates upon the mysteries of the heart. He explains how the Self emerges as a point source of light and consciousness associated with the true Heart center and its influences circulate as light throughout the interior dimensions of a human being:

The effulgent light of active consciousness starts at a point and gives light to the entire body even as the sun does to the world. When that light spreads out in the body one gets the experiences in the body. The sages call the original point “*Hridayam*” (the Heart)... The Individual permeates the entire body, with that light, becomes egocentric and thinks that he is the body and that the world is different from himself... The association of the Self with the body is called the *Granthi* (knot)... When Atma (the Self) alone shines, within and without, and everywhere ... one is said to have severed the knot.¹⁵

The Self within the heart has inner connections to the universe, to spiritual realities and even to God. In the *Upanishads* of ancient India, the heart doctrine is elaborated most eloquently:

Within the lotus of the heart he dwells, where, like the spokes of a wheel in its hub, the nerves meet... This Self, who understands all, who knows all, and whose glory is manifest in the universe, lives within the lotus of the heart, the

bright throne of Brahman... Self-luminous is that Being, and formless. He dwells within all and without all... The Self exists in man, within the lotus of the heart, and is the master of his life and of his body... The knot of the heart, which is ignorance, is loosed, all doubts are dissolved. *Mundaka Upanishad*¹⁶

As large as the universe outside, even so large is the universe within the lotus of the heart. Within it are heaven and earth, the sun, the moon, the lightning, and all the stars. What is in the macrocosm is in this microcosm... All things that exist ... are in the city of Brahman. *Chandogya Upanishad*¹⁷

Sacred religious texts from the world’s religions associate states of illumined, spiritual and cosmic consciousness with the sacred Heart space. Such teachings, in fact, suggest that there is a deep holographic physics and metaphysics to the human heart and Self.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a classic text of Indian spiritual knowledge described as “the cream of the Vedas.” Lord Krishna, the Personality of the Godhead, elaborates upon the nature of the Self and the process of attaining self-knowledge. “The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone’s heart, O Arjuna, and is directing the wanderings of all living entities, who are seated as on a machine made of material energy.”¹⁸ According to the Gita, both the Supreme Lord (the Supersoul or Paramatma) and the individual spirit soul (the jivatma) are associated with the heart: “I am that Lord represented as the Supersoul, dwelling in the heart of every embodied being.”

Out of compassion for them, I, dwelling in their hearts, destroy with the shining lamp of knowledge the darkness born of ignorance. (10, 11)

I am the Self, O conqueror of sleep, seated in the hearts of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings. (10, 20)

The Supersoul and the individual soul are compared to two birds sitting together on the branch of a tree. The individual soul is capti-

vated by the fruits of the tree, which represent material desires, while the Supersoul is a silent witness. To attain liberation, the individual spirit soul must overcome patterns of attachment to

pleasurable experiences, desires and the fruits of action, and surrender to the larger Self of the Lord. Self-realization, or union with the Lord, comes through awakening to the eternal principle within the sacred temple of the heart.

Human consciousness originates from the jivatma, the individual spiritual soul embodied within the heart.

According to this formulation, consciousness is the light of the spiritual soul as the jivatma is inherently self-illuminating: “as the sun alone illuminates all this universe, so does the living entity, one within the body, illuminate the entire body by consciousness.”¹⁹ Swami Prabhupada elaborates the meaning of this sacred text:

As the sun is situated in one place, but is illuminating the whole universe, so a small particle of spirit soul, although situated in the heart of this body, is illuminating the whole body by consciousness. Thus consciousness is the proof of the presence of the soul, as sunshine or light is the proof of the presence of the sun ... consciousness is not a production of the combination of matter. It is the symptom of the living entity. The consciousness of the living entity, although qualitatively one with the supreme consciousness, is not supreme because the consciousness of one particular body

Spiritual teachings elaborate an alternative model of the higher dimensional origins of human consciousness and self. Whereas modern science presupposes that material processes within the brain produce consciousness and the experience of self, mystical and esoteric perspectives describe consciousness as the light of Self and as emerging from *within-without* through some higher dimensional physics and metaphysics of the human heart.

does not share that of another body. But the Supersoul, which is situated in all bodies as the friend of the individual soul, is conscious of all bodies. That is

the difference between supreme consciousness and individual consciousness.²⁰

A small particle of spirit soul (the spiritual spark) inhabits the material heart as the “sun” of the body. The spiritual soul is self-illuminating and its light is an expression of the infinite light of That Self, the Supersoul.

Swami Yogeshwaranand Saraswati in *Science of Soul: A Treatise on Higher Yoga* (1987)

provides one of the most comprehensive accounts of the nature of the Soul and its relationship to the physical and subtle bodies. The jivatma is likened to “an infinitesimal poppy

seed,” which has no form or color. This atomic or indivisible entity is embodied in “a hollow the size of a small thumb in the heart.”²¹ Saraswati describes the “Bliss Sheath”:

The golden sheath of the divine city ... which is a mass of light filled with bliss, has its abode in the subtle area of grape-sized hollow of this physical heart, the repository of blood. It is in the castle of this causal sheath that the immortal individual soul abides with its supreme protector, all-powerful, omniscient, adorable father—God. The temple of a yogi is inside the heart alone. There ... the vision of Divinity ... the nectar of bliss ... the Bliss Sheath (or Anandamaya Kosha).²²

The Bliss Sheath is the ensouled jivatma, the essential heart center, also referred to as the

causal body. Saraswati notes: “it is instinctually recognized that Jivatman denoted by the pure form of ‘I’ has its abode in the heart, and in Samadhi there is direct realization of this.”²³ Within the Bliss Sheath, there are orbits of different principles that mediate between the divine atom, or jivatma, at the center, and the dimensions of the sheaths and bodies. Through yogic practices and austerities, consciousness can be freed from the outer sheaths and abide again in the bliss sheath—in its essential nature. As these processes of liberation occur, varied states of super-consciousness and realization (or *samadhis*) are experienced. There are subtle distinctions to be made between experiences of self, cosmic and divine realization, which can be attained through the awakening within the heart and the subsequent illumination of the higher centers.²⁴

These teachings have practical application within self study, as is evident if we consider these profound comments provided by yogi and medical doctor Dr. R. Mishra:

The physical heart and physical consciousness are related. In the same way, the spiritual heart and spiritual consciousness are related... Life and consciousness are byproducts of the heart... Biological heart and consciousness are physical in nature and they depend on the metaphysical heart and consciousness. In reality, consciousness is not created but manifested and this manifestation depends on the evolution of the nervous system ... and blood... Your principle aim is to reach the spiritual heart and spiritual consciousness by means of the physical heart and physical consciousness.²⁵

Whereas modern psychology and science have considered consciousness to be non-substantive, nothing in itself, the Dalai Lama and the mystical literature clearly equate consciousness with light. The Self is inherently self-illuminating. The Dalai Lama explains that consciousness is such an inner illumination that reflects the deeper Mind of Clear Light:

Consciousness is defined as that which is luminous and knowing. It is luminous in the double sense that its nature is clear and that it illuminates, or reveals, like a lamp that dispels darkness so that objects may be seen... Consciousness is composed of moments, instead of cells, atoms, or particles. In this way consciousness and matter have different natures, and therefore, they have different substantive causes.²⁶

Consciousness is light that illuminates the objects of human experience—the material side of nature. The Dalai Lama notes, “Matter cannot make consciousness.”²⁷

Middle-Eastern traditions point to the same teaching of the heart. The celebrated Sufi poet Rumi depicts the plight of the lost souls searching for God and Self in the outer world:

Cross and Christians, end to end, I examined. He was not on the Cross. I went to the Hindu temple, to the ancient pagoda. In none of them was there any sign. To the uplands of Herat I went, and to Kandahar, I looked. He was not on the heights or in the lowlands... I went to the Kaaba of Mecca. He was not there... I asked about him from Avicenna... [Finally] I looked into my own heart. In that, his place, I saw him. He was in no other place.²⁸

Similarly, a poet of the heart and soul, Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet* is asked by the people to “Speak to us of Self-Knowledge.” And the prophet answered, saying, “Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights. But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart’s knowledge.”²⁹

Mystical and esoteric teachings and practices can enable an individual to overcome the illusions, conditioning and limitations of *pseudo-I*—the sense of ego or I associated with the personality and mind centered within the brain—and to realize the deeper dimensions of “I” within the heart. The realization of Self within the Heart is the basis for the mystical declaration “I AM.”

Western Sources

The heart doctrine is illustrated most simply in an Aboriginal tale about creation and the gods:

One day ... the gods decided to create the universe. They created the stars, the sun and the moon. They created the seas, the mountains, the flowers, and the clouds. Then they created human beings. At the end, they created Truth.

At this point, however, a problem arose: where should they hide Truth so that human beings would not find it right away? They wanted to prolong the adventure of the search.

“Let’s put Truth on top of the highest mountain,” said one of the gods. Certainly it will be hard to find it there.”

“Let’s put it on the farthest star,” said another.

“Let’s hide it in the darkest and deepest of abysses.”

“Let’s conceal it on the secret side of the moon.”

At the end, the wisest and most ancient god said, “No, we will hide Truth inside the very heart of human beings. In this way they will look for it all over the Universe, without being aware of having it inside of themselves all the time.”³⁰

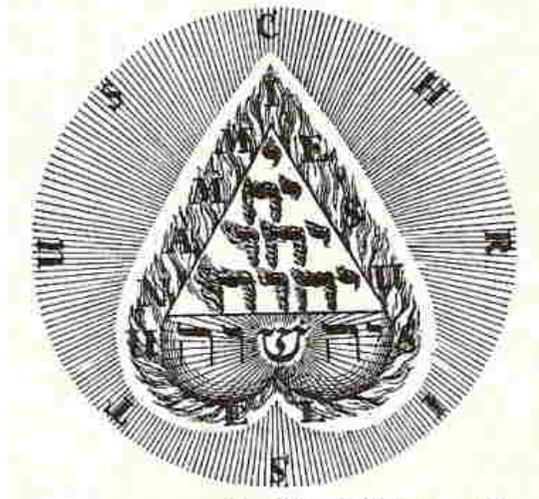
In the Kabbalah, wisdom and understanding are associated with the Heart and truth is described in the Judaic tradition as “under our noses” the whole time. Scholar C. Kramer explains, “the heart is truly a wonder, for its creative action mirrors the original act of Creation.”³¹ In terms of the creation of the universe, Kabbalah depicts the “Zimzum” contraction as a process by which the infinite limits itself, or withdraws its limitless light

from a volume of space to allow a finite being to emerge into existence. This creates a hollow or seeming void at the heart of being. Thus, within a human being, “God is always extremely near, for God resides within one’s heart—within one’s “vacated space.”³² The Heart is such a hollow Space within us, a form of “nothingness at the heart of being.” Kramer explains, “the passion of the heart is really an infinite desire for the Ein Sof.”³³

The teachings of Kabbalah offer a complex mathematical and metaphysical model of the inner geometry of being and non-being, and the higher dimensional origins of consciousness within the sacred heart Space—within the *Sephiroth of Tipheret* in the *Tree of Life*. The microcosm of a human being is designed on the same basic principles of creation as embodied within the macrocosm of the Universe. Hence, key Kabbalist ideas concerning the creation of the universe provide a valuable model for the emergence of human consciousness. In Judaic mysticism, the soul longs to experience the joy and revelations of God within the heart. Kramer notes,

The power of joy is so intense that it can bring one to a revelation of Godliness within one’s heart... The Divine Presence corresponds to the joy of the heart... One’s burning desire for Torah and spirituality enables one to draw from the spirituality of the Supernal Heart (Binah).³⁴

We are living Torahs with the Word and the laws of God written into our very being—in fact into the Heart. So then there must be a form of higher dimensional physics and metaphysics to the heart. This figure from mystic Jacob Boehme depicts the Word, the four letter name of God, inscribed within the heart—although a spiritual heart of flames turned upwards relative to the material heart.³⁵



Kabbalists maintain that there are such divine source emanations or divine sparks as stars in space, points of supernal light related to the higher dimensional vacated Space of the heart! Such “sparks of holiness” emerge from the primordial realm of *Adam Kadmon*.

A central mystical Christian teaching is, “the kingdom of heaven is within,” and the state of Christ Consciousness involves the mystical awakening of the heart. This teaching is suggested within the *Old and New Testaments* and numerous Christian writings, hymns and church doctrine. Matthew 5:8, states, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Generally, this teaching is not understood in its significance as a principle of psychology—as a science of the Soul.

Early sects of the Gnostic Christians taught that to know oneself at the deepest level was simultaneously to know God or the Father as the source of the divine, spiritual and soul life within. The Gospels of the *Nag Hammadi Library*—manuscripts discovered in Egypt in 1945—provide a rich source of esoteric Christian teachings. In the *Gospel of Truth*, Christ encourages the disciples to gain the light that is within them, instead of living in outer darkness; and to “proclaim the things that are in the heart of the Father in order to teach those who will receive teaching.” The roots of the Self are within the heart and the pleroma:

You ... of interior knowledge ... Say, then, from the heart that you are the perfect day and in you dwells the light that does not fail... They are the ones who appear in truth since they exist in true and eternal life and speak of the light which is perfect and filled with the seed of the Father, and which is in his heart and in the pleroma, while his Spirit rejoices in it and glorifies the one in whom it existed.³⁶

Those of “*interior knowledge*” have realized their spiritual nature and know of the perfect light within the heart. The “seeds of the Father” are within the “pleroma” of the divine mother. The term pleroma, like that of the divine plenum, refers to the fullness of things, or the infinite potential latent within God as the Ein Soph.

The term “heart doctrine” was used by H. P. Blavatsky in her classic *The Voice of the Silence* (1877), which depicts the plight of the soul and the process of spiritual attainment. Blavatsky notes, “The ‘Doctrine of the Eye’ is for the crowd, the ‘Doctrine of the Heart,’ for the elect.” This suggests that the heart doctrine is a higher teaching than that which focuses upon the awakening of the third eye. Further, Blavatsky tells us that we must learn to separate “Head learning” from “Soul Wisdom” and states, “‘Great Sifter’ is the name of the ‘Heart Doctrine.’” If one so sifts through

the esoteric literature, one can uncover this nugget of gold. In Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), one of the ancient *Stanzas of Dzyan* states, "the Sons expand and contract through their own selves and hearts; they embrace infinitude ... reflecting the 'Self-existing Lord' like a mirror, each becomes in turn a world." In the *Stanzas*, the term *Son* refers not only to any created *Kosmos*, but also to individual beings. Blavatsky regarded the heart as the center of the original undifferentiated "laya center" and of buddhic consciousness.

In modern times, the American mystic *Adi Da* clearly embodies the heart doctrine:

The true Self is Awake in your own heart... The region of the heart, which is the seat of the soul and the doorway to the true Self, is one of the primary areas of the body-mind traditionally inspected by mystical vision... The true center of the heart is intuitively felt... The heart-root is prior to the physical and subtle structures of the body-mind... It is prior to all energies and forms in the Realm of Nature.³⁷

The Self is prior to the physical and subtle dimensions of the heart. *Adi Da* explains that in the process of spiritual awakening, one transcends the death of the egoic psyche by "awakening at the heart in the disposition that is prior to the heartbeat itself." By this passage, the peripheral personality yields to the central consciousness of being!

Another enigma within modern science that has great significance from an esoteric perspective concerns the manner in which the heart generates its own electrical impulses through the pacemaker—the SA Node, the AV node and the fibers of the Bundle of His. Psychologist B. Brown once explained, "The genesis of the heartbeat is as unknown as the genesis of man, and equally a miracle."³⁸ Scientists have been unable to explain this phenomenon from a materialist perspective, whereas from an occult viewpoint, it is the presence of the *jivatma*, the living spiritual soul, which so enlivens the material heart. In this case, the material effect—the generation

of the heartbeat—is due to metaphysical causes. Further, the distribution of consciousness through the body is related to the blood flow and the ensoulment of the living organism through the breath and the process of oxygenation. Consciousness is never simply centered up in the mind in the head, no matter what scientists may think.³⁹

Concluding Remarks

Spiritual teachings elaborate an alternative model of the higher dimensional origins of human consciousness and self. Whereas modern science presupposes that material processes within the brain produce consciousness and the experience of self, mystical and esoteric perspectives describe consciousness as the light of Self and as emerging from *within-without* through some higher dimensional physics and metaphysics of the human heart. Mystical teachings further suggest profound possibilities for states of awakened consciousness, enlightenment, illumination and liberation associated with the awakening of the heart and the subsequent illumination of higher centers.

These teachings provide an alternative viewpoint to those perspectives offered by so-called "exact science" with its denial of spirit, soul and any transcendental or religious principle. If we speak off the tops of our heads, we can simply assume that the head-brain produces consciousness and mind, but if we penetrate to the heart of being, to the Heart of ourselves, might we indeed become *Knowers of Self*? From a spiritual perspective, modern psychology and philosophy are filled with head knowledge but lack the secret wisdom of the Self within the Heart. Consciousness and Self are substantive and should not simply be used as generic terms to identify the flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations that occur within subjective experience generated by the brain. There is something far deeper happening within a human being as concerns the origin and nature of consciousness. The Self exists in relationship to a hierarchy of interpenetrating world orders—metaphysical dimensions of spiritual and divine existence that underlie

and sustain the realms of subtle and gross matter. These dynamics allow for afterlife existence and for complex relationships of the individual to the Sun, to the larger Universe and most importantly to spiritual and divine realities.

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- ¹ G. Roth, "The Quest to Find Consciousness". *Scientific American* (Special Edition on mind, 2004).
 - ² J. Horgan, *The Undiscovered Mind: How the Human Brain Defies Replication, Medication, and Explanation* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1999), 228.
 - ³ Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2005), 130.
 - ⁴ Horgan, 260.
 - ⁵ Dalai Lama, 133.
 - ⁶ Roth, 34.
 - ⁷ *Ibid.*
 - ⁸ R. Sperry, "Emergence" (in *The Omni Interview*. New York, Omni Press Books, 1984).
 - ⁹ I. Asimov, "The Subtlest Difference" (in Abell, G. & Singer, B., eds., *Science and the Paranormal*. New York: Scribners Sons, 1981), 158.
 - ¹⁰ C. Sagan, Interview in *Psychology Today* (Jan/Feb, 1996), 65.
 - ¹¹ Guru Bawa, "The Mind is in the Heart" (Interview in *Psychology Today*, April, 1977).
 - ¹² Sri G. Chinmoy, *Yoga and the Spiritual Life* (New York: Tower Publications, 1970), 16.
 - ¹³ The term "ego" is usually taken to refer to our lesser self or personality, a part of the healthy development of a human being. However, sometimes the term "Ego" is used in the more archaic form, to refer to the true Self. A. Bailey capitalizes Ego when referring to the Soul.
 - ¹⁴ Ramana Maharshi, *The Sage of Arunacala* (London: Mahadevan, Allen & Unwin, 1977), 90-91.
 - ¹⁵ K. Bhikshu, *Sri Ramana Gita: Dialogues of Maharshi* (India: Tiruvannamalai, 1966), 39-42.
 - ¹⁶ S. Prabhavananda & F. Manchester (eds.), *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 45-46.
 - ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.
 - ¹⁸ A. Prabhupada, *Bhagavad-Gita: As It Is* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1972).
 - ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.
 - ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 659-660.

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- ²¹ Swami Yogeshwaranand Saraswati, *Science of Soul: A Treatise on Higher Yoga* (New Delhi: Yoga Niketan Trust, 1987), 36.
 - ²² *Ibid.*, 37.
 - ²³ *Ibid.*, 69.
 - ²⁴ Following Descartes, the pineal gland is sometimes suggested as the seat for the Soul. The light-sensitive pineal gland has even been labelled as "the heart of the brain" and is said to anchor the thousand-petaled lotus of the crown chakra. However, in yogic psychology the mind is regarded as the lunar orbit relative to the solar orbit of the heart.
 - ²⁵ R. Mishra, *Fundamentals of Yoga* (New York: Lancer Books, 1969), 139-40.
 - ²⁶ Dalai Lama, *Advice on Dying: And Living a Better Life* (New York: Atria Books, 2002), 129.
 - ²⁷ Dalai Lama, in R. Weber, *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages: The Search for Unity* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 236.
 - ²⁸ Rumi, in I. Shah, *The Way of the Sufi* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), 105.
 - ²⁹ Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1968), 54-55.
 - ³⁰ W. Mills, *Tone Magazine* (Ottawa, Ontario, April, 1999).
 - ³¹ Chaim Kramer, *Anatomy of the Soul* (Jerusalem: Breslov Research Institute, 1998).
 - ³² *Ibid.*, 218.
 - ³³ *Ibid.*, 211.
 - ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 231-2.
 - ³⁵ This illustration is from Manly Hall's *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Quabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1978).
 - ³⁶ J. Robinson (Ed.), *Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 44, 49.
 - ³⁷ Adi Da, *The Enlightenment of the Whole Body* (California: Dawn Horse Press, 1978), 387-390.
 - ³⁸ B. Brown, *New Mind, New Body: Biofeedback: New Directions for the Mind* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1974), 227.
 - ³⁹ In modern science, researchers map brain functions by monitoring blood flow to determine which parts of the brain are active during different cognitive tasks. Unfortunately, scientists do not consider that the blood flow might itself be related to the experience of consciousness.