The Heart heals the Head

Dwai Lahiri
(previously published at http://www.mukti.world written under the pen-name "implicateorder")

As human beings, we have a unique ability that seems to be missing from the rest of the animal kingdom, on Earth. We can think, we can formulate concepts that explain how the universe works, we can create breath-takingly beautiful works of art. We can take abstract concepts and make them real. Almost all of the technological advances we can think of stems from this ability.

For all of these, we use the mind. In the English language, the word mind is a catchall, that includes all our cognitive functions.

From the wikipedia page titled "Mind", we get --

The mind is a set of cognitive faculties including consciousness, perception, thinking, judgement, language and memory. It is usually defined as the faculty of an entity's thoughts and consciousness. It holds the power of imagination, recognition, and appreciation, and is responsible for processing feelings and emotions, resulting in attitudes and actions.

In the Hindu systems, the mind (manas) is considered to be part of a larger complex of functions. These are called the "antahkarana", or the inner causes. This classifies the cognitive faculties into four parts --

1. Ahamkāra - The function that identifies the Atman (Self) to the body
2. Buddhi - The intellect, that is able to analyze, study and understand things
3. Manas - The mind, that is responsible for sensory processing and cognition
4. Chitta - This is the storehouse of memories and impressions

These four form the cognitive faculties that we are so dependent on for our day-to-day functioning.

But there are a couple more ways to categorize the "mind", which I will use in order to help identify and know each one, and then experiment with them. Odds are, that once you start recognizing the difference between the two, especially the "thinking mind and heart-mind/spiritual-mind", you will be able to tangibly experience how they differ and how using the Heart-mind will help reduce internal conflicts and positively impact your life.

1. Thinking Mind and the Working Mind - The Thinking Mind, as the name suggests, is that aspect of our mind that thinks. The working mind is that which takes care of the functions that do not require any thoughts.
2. The Thinking Mind and the Spiritual or Heart Mind - This categories a deeper mind, that operates at a completely different level than the world of thoughts, etc.

The role of the thinking mind, is to separate reality (or our experience of it), into two -- the subject and Object; me and the other; mine and not mine, and so on. It is a differentiating process.
The heart-mind on the other hand, does not cognize that way at all. In the heart-mind's perception, there is no separation. There is still cognition, but not a separation of subject and object.

Try this experiment --

• As you go for a walk outside, look at your surroundings, let's say you're walking in a peaceful and calm park, and there are beautiful trees all around. Look at a tree as you normally would. See how you feel - you will find that there is a "Me", who is looking at the "tree". Now look at another tree, may be a shrub, a pond, and so on.

• Immediately after this, imagine that you are looking from your heart (in the center of your chest) at the same things you saw. Look at the first tree now, and note if you find a difference in how it feels to you. Does the tree feel separate from you? Does it feel like there is a separate you and a separate tree? Or is there simply cognition, without the separation? Similarly, look at the same things (or other things) you had noticed in the first step, and observe if there is a sense of separateness.

• After you have sufficiently practiced this way of seeing, you can now try to find a plant exceedingly beautiful. Maybe something with wonderfully beautiful flowers. See it with your heart mind. Next look at a plant that you would not normally consider beautiful, maybe even a weed. Look at it with your heart mind. Do you find that --
  1. There is a sense of separateness between you and the plant?
  2. Do you find there is a sense of qualitative difference in how you perceive the "beautiful plant" and the weed?

• After having done the previous exercise, now look at some animals. If you have a dog (or your neighbor's dog), look at it with your heart-mind. And then look at a human being with your heart-mind. Do you find there is a sense of separateness, or a sense of "difference" between your perception of the dog and the human being?

• After having sufficiently experimented this way, try looking at someone you like or love with the heart-mind. Next look at someone whom you don't like or have issues with, with your heart-mind. Do you find that you still find the ill-feelings towards the disliked person once you see them with your heart-mind? Do you find that you have some perceptual difference between your loved one and the disliked one? Or that there is a sense of separateness between you and the the loved one or the disliked one?

With practice, we can continue to perceive the world around us, with the heart-mind. Using the thinking mind (we normally associate this with the head) is a learnt skill. We learn it as we grow up.

I believe that as babies and toddlers even, we use the heart-mind. Only when the objective reality of the world is re-inforced in our growing years, we start using the thinking mind.

In the same way, we can learn to start using the heart-mind more frequently. This will show us that there is no objective separation between us and the world at all. It is just a function of the thinking mind. The world will start becoming beautiful again, as everything is just a part of our own Self; and slowly but steadily, we will find that even if the thinking mind rises first and a negative reaction is triggered due to certain situations, by using the heart-mind, we can neutralize and transform the negativity into love.
My Master pointed out the difference between the thinking mind and the spiritual mind or heart-mind to me, and that is continuing to change my life in ways I couldn't even have fathomed at that time. To be fair, he didn't teach me in words what I have written above, but I believe they stem from the spiritual seed he planted in me when I met him for the first time.

Gradually, I'm finding that this way of using the heart-mind is the way to relieve the pain we inflict upon ourselves with our compulsive thinking, with the constant judging and discriminating between this and that. The constant separation of objects from ourselves, the "subjects".

So, let us cut back on how often we use our thinking mind, and use our heart mind instead.