

A silhouette of a person with long hair, seen from the side, looking out over a vast landscape of clouds at sunset. The sky is a gradient of blue and orange, and the clouds are illuminated from below, creating a warm, golden glow. The person's silhouette is dark against the bright background.

# Heart Intelligence

AWAKENING  
YOUR INTUITIVE  
ABILITIES

*By  
Jeff D. Nixa*

“We learn, slowly, that the loudest voice in our head is not always the wisest voice in our life.

### Two Paths: Mind and Heart

In our lives there are two great sources of information available to us for perceiving and navigating the world: the rational, analytical way of the mind and the soulful, felt sense of the heart. The mind is the king of conscious reality and specializes in the logical, verbal, archetypal masculine realm of visible information, matter, analysis, clock time, science, technology, reasoned principles, ideology, judgments, and knowledge. It parses things into their individual components, emphasizing separateness and differences. But the heart is the queen of unconscious reality and specializes in the intuitive, nonverbal, archetypal feminine realm of spirit, nature, darkness, mystery, dreams, and poetry. It emphasizes the relationships among things and our connectedness to all life. The mind *thinks*, but it cannot perceive mystery or unconscious reality. The heart *feels*, but it cannot speak in words or be dispassionate and logical.

Of these two available ways of perceiving our environment, the conscious mind completely dominates our modern approach to

healing, life navigation, and decision making. The king, the loud, chatty, thinking conscious self—the voice in our head—always wants the microphone of control in our decision-making process and is quick to dismiss the quieter whispers of heart and intuition that come from the deep kingdom of the queen. But we learn, slowly, that the loudest voice in our head is not always the wisest voice in our life.

The problem is not that our rational minds or our achievements in modern science, technology, and civilization are lacking in value. The problem is that we don't equally value and use the heart. So when our rational approaches fail, or even cause us harm, instead of consulting the heart with its entirely different realm of experience and information, we go *back* to the failed approach and repeat the same mistakes from the same playbook of reason. We seek a “bigger hammer”: more data, more research, more words, a stronger medication, a different technology, another scripture verse.

All of this falls into the archetypal masculine realm of rational intellect, science, and ideol-

ogy. At no point do we stop and ask the huge missing questions that dwell in the archetypal feminine realm of the body, soul, spirit, and Earth itself, questions such as: Who am I? What am I doing here on this Earth, really? What is my place in the world beyond my job, possessions, favorite sports team, and social network?

We don't ask those questions because we don't have a social, economic, political, or religious system that honors the heart, the wisdom of the body, or balance with nature. I am referring to the implicit values and belief system(s) underlying American business, consumer culture, and mainstream religion. Contrast this with the startling actions of Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2010), which rewrote their constitutions to give nature—trees, rivers, animals—legal rights and protections similar to human beings and corporations. These include the right to life and to exist; the right to continue vital cycles and processes free from human alteration; the right to pure water and clean air; the right to balance; the right not to be polluted; and the

right to not have cellular structures modified or genetically altered. Controversially, these laws will also enshrine the right of nature “to not be affected by mega-infrastructure and development projects that affect the balance of ecosystems and the local inhabitant communities.”

Synchronistically for me, the week I finished my second draft of my book, Pope Francis released his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, on the relationship between climate change, consumerism, and social injustice. This was a rare, welcome, and blunt demand for care of the whole planet and everything on it, not just for our particular human aspirations, institutions (the church!), human security, and profit. Later Pope Francis stood before the U.S. Congress and gave a pointed challenge to the leaders of the most powerful nation in the world to better address the causes of climate change, the unjust distribution of wealth, the protection of life in all stages and forms, and other issues, including the unjust treatment of indigenous people.

As I listened to the pope's speech, I was



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struck by the warmth of heart that shone through his slow and heavily accented English. Despite his plunge into the most politicized of social issues (and his own rational training as a chemist and theologian), Francis led with his heart, not with ideology or scripture. By speaking from the heart, he was able to connect with the hearts of his listeners. The following day, I noted a conspicuous absence of negative political reactions to Francis’s speech.

We have reached a turning point in our progress as a nation and as a civilization. At this critical time in the life of our planet, our primary need is not for more data, doctors, or different technologies for industrial growth. Instead, we need different *people*—more heart-open people living from their spiritual center. We need people with broader states of consciousness than any superficial label of “Democrat” or “Republican,” “American” or “Chinese,” “Christian” or “Muslim” can offer us. We need people with “a psyche the size of the Earth,” as psychologist James Hillman says. We need a spirituality and spiritual

practices that are ecological, not just anthropological, and a religious mythology concerned not just with human sin and salvation but with the whole planet and everything on it.

We will find this mythology right where it was abandoned or suppressed centuries ago: in the beliefs and practices of our own indigenous ancestors. Their innate Earth-honoring consciousness kept them anchored in the heart and intimately connected with the natural world around them. Their shaman healers saw human illness and unhappiness as indications of soul loss first, not a lack of technology, research, or medication. This ancient wisdom is still practiced today and is making a big comeback in popular interest, spiritual practice, and academic study.

### The Heart Path

The shamanic approach I will describe here is not a religion but a set of general tools from Earth-honoring cultures for living a life in balance with soul, nature, and the world of spirit. The core methodology is called the Path of

the Heart, a four-stage process of psychological individuation and spiritual maturation. Derived from the work of C. Michael Smith, it involves an archetypal initiation, a classic hero’s journey deep into one’s soul to identify and confront the issues that are causing the trouble and then eliminating or transforming them into a new vision and power for living. The goal of shamanic healing is to help individuals become more vital people, living lives of purpose, joy, and service to others. This includes walking on Earth more gently as a healer, rather than as a parasite consuming its resources and returning nothing of value to the planet.

This is not an article of religious beliefs, popular psychology, or new age thinking. The wisdom contained herein is very “old age,” derived as it is from the experiences of our indigenous ancestors who used it to navigate, heal, and stay alive for tens of thousands of years without our modern technology, weapons, agriculture, or medicine.

Anyone can learn the techniques contained in this article and my book. You don’t need

to be a spiritual medium, a mystic, or even a person of faith. Like a person who wants to learn how to swim, however, you *will* need to get wet. More than just reading a book about swimming technique (the history and traditions of shamanism), you will need to step off the shore and take a plunge into the wet and deep realm of the spirit world. You may have never done this before. But the spirit world has been here all along—inside us, all around us, influencing us. We’ve just been socialized to ignore it, fear it, or deny it even exists.

### The Crux of It All: Getting Clear on Your Center

The realm of shamanic practice is vast, ancient, and deep. Reading this will not make you a shaman. Shamanism is a difficult life path and shamans “in the wild” often spend their lives from childhood on apprenticing and working with ancestor and animal spirits and plant medicine. Modern teachers like Sandra Ingerman have devoted entire books to single aspects of shamanic healing such as shamanic journeying and soul retrieval. But

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what we can do in this article is help you to get clear on your Core Self, your soul or spiritual center. These are all names for the heart.

And that will change everything.

When you get clear on your center, you will have great power in the world. You will have a clear vision for your life and know where you are going. You can say yes and no with ease. You can laugh when others criticize you because you see their own fear and lack of direction. You will be the captain of your ship, born to handle the wind and waves. You can steer to ports of your choice, navigating by the compass of your heart toward the destiny of your life. Opportunity will open before you, and trouble and pain will be like mere gusts of wind. Your relationships will be positive and supportive, or you will end them. You will be surrounded by vibrant people because the influence of a vital person vitalizes others. You will walk the Earth as a light, a healer, and as a true sorcerer living from your source.

If you are not clear on your center, you will suffer. Without a vision and navigational sys-

tem, you will be adrift in the sea of powerful and self-interested voices inside you and all around you. You will doubt your actions and be stung by criticism. Without power inside, endless family demands and work dramas will push you off course like big waves hitting a small boat. You will labor on someone else's ship, working for their dreams and their profit. You will keep yourself small and unnoticed to minimize risk and pain, preferring stagnant harbors to the open sea. You will fill your days with busyness, work, watching TV, cleaning and shopping, eating and complaining with friends—but never setting forth. And you will feel alone. The Great Spirit will not be able to reach you because you have not found yourself.

In my own life, thanks to gifted teachers and the practices I share in my book, I am now clear on my center. I know exactly why I am on this planet, what my purpose is, and when I am “on the beam” or “off the beam” of my life. With this knowledge, I periodically sit back and actually sketch out the kind



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of life I want to have in the months and years ahead, including activities, workshops, travel, and personal and family time. Knowing my purpose, I can easily say yes or no to relationships, new opportunities, potential distractions, family issues, and friendships. I know who I am, and I am no longer confused about this. It doesn't really matter to me now what others think as I go about living my authentic life, a life now aligned with my heart and not the other way around. I have detached from my old life-support system based on social approval and have plugged it into a new support system based on the vibrant, guiding intelligence within me and around me.

For example, to get this book written, I had to turn down many new potential clients and social engagements and change my daily chore and fitness routines. But I did so without hesitation, guilt, or regret because I knew that getting the book written was the prime directive. I explained my changes to others as needed, but whether they understood this or approved of my priorities was of little importance to me. This kind of deep conviction, clarity, and inner power has been a huge and

positive change for a man who was raised “Minnesota nice” and was unable to express my real feelings or deal with conflict earlier in my life.

### Heart Communication 101

In order to get clear on your spiritual center, you need to be able to perceive the subtle communications from your heart on a moment-by-moment basis. In their simplest form, these communications can feel like the three colors of a traffic light: a green (yes/move forward) signal; a red (no/stop this course) signal; and a yellow (caution/slow down/wait) signal. Like a traffic light, these three basic tones change constantly. Each signal can be physically felt in the body and is experienced as:

- » A pleasant attraction or invitation (green light/yes)
- » An unpleasant sense of repulsion or a feeling of disinterest (red light/no)
- » An unclear hesitancy (yellow light/not yet)

To better illustrate these basic heart communications, here is an exercise to help you experience them as they shift back and forth, as the light changes. You will be *sensing* these different felt tones, not thinking about them conceptually, through shifts in feeling, bodily sensation, imagery, emotion, and intuition.

### Exercise: Experiencing the Heart's Navigational Guidance System

1. **Sit comfortably on a chair** with both feet on the ground. Take three deep breaths, exhaling slowly through your mouth. Close your eyes.
2. **Imagine a real person** you love to be with. Picture that person in front of you. Imagine their clothing, posture, facial expression, eyes, and mannerisms.
3. **Holding that person's image** in front of you, draw your attention to your chest and belly area. Notice what you are experiencing there physically. Scan your body for subtle sensations and pay attention to where in your body you are feeling them. Take your time. Notice

your breathing and inner feelings.

4. **Take three deep breaths** and clear the image of that person.
5. **Now picture a real person** you can hardly stand to be with, a person who may have hurt you or caused pain. Picture that person right in front of you. As before, clearly note their clothing, posture, facial expression, eyes, and mannerisms. Now do the same body scan of yourself and notice what you are experiencing physically, in your body, especially in the chest and gut area. Take your time. Notice your breathing, and the area around your heart. Note anything different from what you sensed with the first person.
6. **Take three deep breaths** and clear your imagination and bodily felt sense completely of this person.
7. **Now for a second time**, imagine the person you love to be with in front of you. Smile. See him or her smile. Again, do a body scan of your physical, felt response to the presence of



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this person in front of you. Notice the differences and where you are feeling these differences in your body.

**8. Clear your imagination,** and repeat with the unpleasant person.

**9. Return a final time** to the person you love to be with. Enjoy that felt sense.

**10. Open your eyes.** Take a few minutes to write down what shifts you felt in your body between each person and where you felt those shifts in your body.

The shifting physical sensations you experienced in the exercise above are the dynamic *feeling tones* of your heart. Feeling tones are the nonverbal language of the heart—and of spirit itself—experienced through your physical body. When honored (carefully explored and skillfully interpreted), they can help you navigate complex life situations as reliably as a compass or GPS unit. Should you take this

job? Marry that person? Move to a different state? Your heart knows the answer, and its navigational guidance system is locked on to your unique destiny and no one else's. When ignored (as I ignored my own persistent body signals in law school), unfortunate things will happen and will continue to happen, just as when you ignore the colors of a traffic light.

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**Jeff Nixa, J.D., M.Div.,** is a shamanic practitioner, teacher, and writer. In 2010 he founded Great Plains Shamanic Programs, an array of counseling, healing, and education services, including one-on-one fire talks, seminars, university classes, outdoor retreats, and wilderness trips. He lives in South Bend, Indiana. Visit his website: [greatplainsguide.net](http://greatplainsguide.net)